

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

A closer look into the Zaire genocide

Germany's politicians are starting to attack the mass murders of the Hutu refugees in Zaire.

The Bonn political establishment has begun to take official notice of the ongoing massacres in Zaire/Congo against the Hutu refugees from Rwanda and Burundi. So far, there has been the diplomatic practice of not addressing the "delicate" issue in public, but raising it only behind closed doors, for example, with Rwandan strongman, Defense Minister Paul Kagame, in Bonn on May 22. No details about this discussion have been leaked to date.

But on June 2, Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel informed the other 14 foreign ministers of the European Union, at their meeting in Luxembourg, that he and the German government had reliable reports about continuing massacres committed by Congo dictator Laurent Kabila's military alliance, and about the intimidation of, and military attacks on, members of international relief organizations. Kinkel recommended that an EU delegation that plans to meet Kabila and his new government, soon, make these massacres an issue. Kinkel demanded that Kabila not only end this genocide, but also cooperate in an independent, international fact-finding mission into the region where the massacres were reported.

On June 3, a senior Foreign Ministry spokesman told me that he did not want to specify who the sources were for Kinkel's statement, but he stressed that they were very reliable, and had provided sound evidence of the massacres. He added that there is sound evidence that massacres persisted after Kabila took power in Kinshasa.

In early May, the Civil Rights Movement Solidarity (BüSo) party of

Germany, whose electoral slate is headed by Helga Zepp LaRouche, provided the Foreign Ministry with a dossier on the genocide. There are also reports from the German Catholic mission Caritas, whose members in eastern Zaire were intimidated, and even subjected to violence and murder by the Kabila forces. On May 16, the German branch of Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders, MSF) made its report available to the Foreign Ministry, and to several parliamentary committees. There are also, I learned in Bonn, the ministry's own dispatches from the embassies in Kinshasa and other African capitals, that reportedly fully confirm the charges against Kabila.

My interlocutor at the Foreign Ministry also said that in addition to the diplomatic pressure on Kabila, Bonn will put pressure on "those responsible persons in other states [of Africa] that have influence on Kabila." This includes Kagame, as well as Ugandan warlord Yoweri Museveni, he confirmed.

Kagame's role in Kabila's march to power was also an issue in the May 21 decision by the German Ministry for Developing Sector Relations, to freeze all financial transfers to Rwanda and Zaire/Congo for aid projects for the Rwandan Hutu refugees, until it is clarified where these refugees are, and guarantees are given that aid will reach them. This decision was taken as Kagame arrived in Bonn for talks with several government officials, and one day before he met the assistant minister for developing-sector relations.

On May 26, a senior spokesman of

the German branch of the UN World Food Program told me that the decision stems from the uncertainty surrounding the whereabouts of the refugees who are dependent on the aid. There are no more refugees within Zaire who can be reached with food and medical aid, he told me: "All the camps have been destroyed, and many if not most, of the refugees have been slain by the Kabila forces," the spokesman said, adding that it is "entirely unclear how many of them are still alive, after having returned to Rwanda."

Relief organizations have no access to Rwanda, because Kigali has not requested any international aid for the returning Hutus. All international aid was linked to the existence of the camps in eastern Zaire, and to the transfer of the refugees—those who survived both the massacres and the exhausting, long marches through the forests back to Rwanda. Whether they survived at all, after their forced return, is entirely unknown, the WFP official said.

The genocide in Zaire/Congo after Kabila's takeover, will furthermore be put on the agenda of the Bonn Parliament's subcommittee of the foreign relations committee for human rights. Members of the subcommittee, next scheduled to meet on June 11, have been provided not only with the BüSo and MSF reports, but with other evidence as well. The German branch of MSF has provided additional evidence about not only the massive intimidation of its relief efforts in Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire/Congo, but also directly about assassinations of their African staff members there. Ulrike von Pilar of MSF/Germany reported in Bonn on June 2, that the scope of targeted assassinations of staff members by genocidal military units in Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire/Congo has been the worst, since the war in Chechnya.