

Rwanda: Critical, stabilizing

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KIGALI, Rwanda — The heartbeat of this nearly terminal country thumped a little louder yesterday.

The war-ravaged capital city, as most of the country, has little potable water, few working phones or toilets and hardly any electricity — but people were beginning to try to go about their business.

For the first time since a rebel army took over, an open-air market was alive with the noise of a back-to-basics economy — hawkers pitching okra and plantains and buyers haggling over the price.

Nearby, the few people with money to spare sipped warm beer in Kigali Night, the hottest nightclub and bordello in town.

Beyond the market and the

club, however, the evidence of Rwanda's difficult road to recovery was everywhere. Neighborhoods were deserted. Buildings lay in ruins, or looted of their contents. Refugees trickling back to their homes lugged the bodies of sick or dead relatives on makeshift stretchers.

Rwanda Patriotic Front soldiers questioned civilians at gunpoint and searched vehicles at roadblocks built with plastic crates.

The new government's Tutsi-dominated leaders, overwhelmed by the demands of resuscitating the country, announced that they will step aside and let a United Nations panel investigate and prosecute officials in the former Hutu-dominated government suspected of waging genocide against the Tutsi.

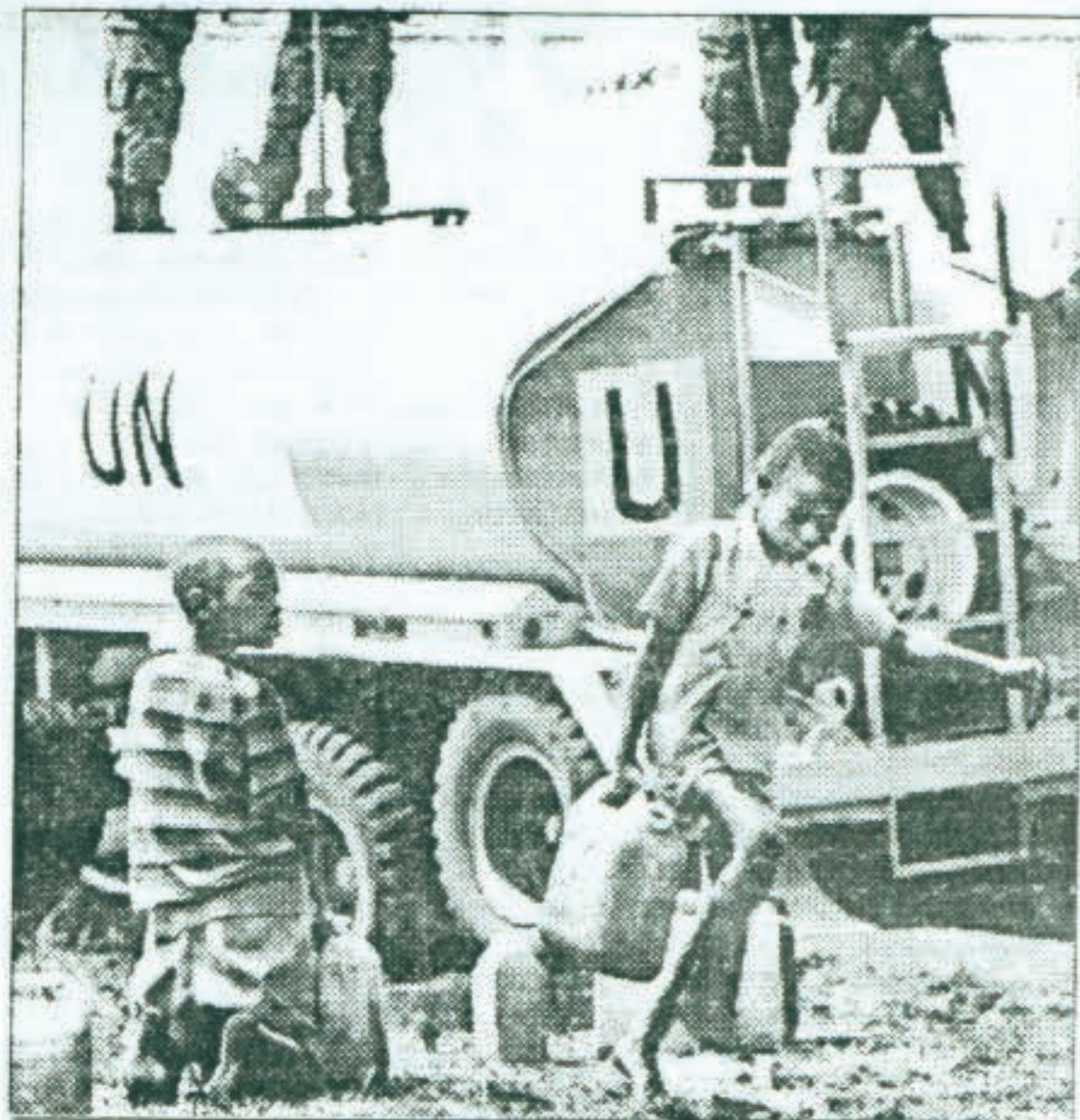
"We recognize the importance of a fair and independent judicial system to stability and democratic reform

and we intend to develop such a system expeditiously," said Alphonse Nkubito, the justice minister.

About 100 people in custody have admitted taking part in the slaughter of nearly 500,000 Tutsis in April and May, government officials say. About 400 more suspects are in jails around the country.

Others are believed to have taken refuge in Zaire or in a French protection zone in southwestern Rwanda. The French have announced plans to withdraw later this month, and the fate of Hutus wanted by the government there is as unclear as the future of Rwanda.

Meanwhile, doctors fear typhus may be a new killer in the Rwandan refugee camps in eastern Zaire. At least 30 people have died in the past few days from a mysterious fever. Tests are being conducted to determine for sure that the killer fever is typhus.



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CANNED LIFE: Two Rwandans at a UN refugee camp in Kibumba, Zaire, carry cans of clean water from a tanker manned by U.S. soldiers.