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Rwanda exiles reared for new genocide

Sam Kiley, Mont Bushale, South Kivu

YOUNG Hutu men, too young to have been involved in the preplanned slaughter of a million Tutsis in Rwanda 13 years ago, are being reared in exile in the eastern Congo as a second generation steeped in the practice and ideology of genocide.

The militia, which calls itself the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, is better known by its original name: the Interahamwe – “Those Who Kill Together”. It now dominates an area the size of Belgium.

Dozens of its leaders are wanted by the United Nations, Rwanda and the Congolese authorities for genocide, murder, arms dealing and extortion.

According to a World Bank study of the militia, the indoctrination of young Hutus has been stepped up in recent months with the slogan “The job is not yet finished”, which echoes a slogan broadcast at the time of the original slaughter: “The graves are not yet full”.

“We are fighting to liberate our country from the dictatorship that oppresses the Hutu majority. We cannot go home because we will be accused of genocide. My father and mother were killed in Rwanda. I ran away to join the militia to free my country,” three young men, Celestine, Faustin, and Alexis said by rote – as if reciting their multiplication tables.

The Interahamwe, driven across the Congo in 1996 by Rwanda’s Tutsi-dominated army, has maintained an extraordinary grip on its members and their families. Every aspect of the lives of an estimated 45,000 civilian and armed Rwandan Hutus living in exile in the Congo is regulated. It runs officer training schools and has at least 7,000 men under arms who are led by a hard core of between 200 and 300 “genocidaires”.

Harald Hinkel, one of the authors of the World Bank report, said: “Cut off the head of the militia and the vast majority would go home.” Until then the Interahamwe, which extracts taxes from the local Congolese and has twice tried to invade Rwanda in the past six years,

continues to have a stranglehold on its own people.

Permits are required to travel individually, and as a family, to visit a local market, communicate by letter or with strangers. Any attempt to return to Rwanda is met with execution or flogging for “treason”.

“We live with the local people and they support us. They help us or we could not be here. They understand our struggle for freedom and want to help us,” insisted Colonel Achile Musemyeri, commander in South Kivu.

“Our men are all volunteers who want to free their nation from oppression.”

“No they are not,” said Captain Victor Kageruka, 46, a former officer serving under Musemyeri. “We had history lessons on how terrible the Tutsis were and are and will be. Our young people were indoctrinated by special units in classrooms. They are taught to hate and fear the Tutsi.” The former captain had escaped by walking three days to a United Nations military base. “We lived by stealing. By looting from the locals. The young men who did not have wives would take them from the villages, they would rape young women,” he added.

In the first six months of this year South Kivu province alone has recorded 4,500 rapes of Congolese women by armed men.

According to Yakin Erturk, of the UN human rights council on violence against women, most of the sexual violence in South Kivu is perpetrated by foreign militias. “These armed groups raid local communities, pillage, rape, sexually enslave women and girls and subject them to forced labour,” she said in July.

It has got worse since then. In Bunyakiri, where a Catholic nun runs a home for 70 raped women and their children, three new cases arrived in just over 12 hours last week. Anastasia Qwa-bena, 34, is a mother of four small children. She was working in her fields when three men from the Interahamwe abducted her and forced her to carry her harvest with them to their camp deep in the forest close to the Kahuzi Biega national park.

“They held me for three months and I was raped all the time. Sometimes I was hired out to another man. I only escaped because they went on a raid to another village and left me behind. I ran for three days until I got here,” she said.

Eastern Congo’s North and South Kivu provinces are now braced for another round of fighting – once again sparked by the Interahamwe. Already 370,000 people have been displaced by skirmishes in a humanitarian disaster that has outstripped the catastrophe in Darfur.

Laurent Nkunda, the Tutsi warlord who reneged on a peace deal to join the Congolese

national army and returned to the bush earlier this year, said: “We are going to fight until the threat of the Interahamwe to the Tutsi people is removed.”

Congolese officials have promised a “massive offensive” against him over the next few weeks. “We are enduring another round of the Rwandan civil war on Congolese soil,” said Chikez Diemu, the Congolese defence minister. “The Interahamwe kill, rape and loot. We’ve had enough.”

In Kinshasa diplomats are unconvinced. “The only solution is to take out the Interahamwe top brass and to do that would take western special forces,” said a western ambassador. “And we see no sign of that.”

Sam Kiley’s film Genocide’s Children will be shown on November 9 on Channel 4