

Kiss



AMBASSADE DE LA REPUBLIQUE RWANDAISE
1714 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20009
(202) 232-2442
TX: 248508 RWAN UR
FAX NO. (202) 232-4544

For Immediate Release

Contact: Christophe Habimana
202-232-2882

RWANDA GOVERNMENT REPORTS INVADERS ARE DESTROYING
NATIONAL PARK, SLAUGHTERING ANIMALS

(Washington, D.C., October 24, 1990) The Rwandan Government today reported that the invading troops, which entered Rwanda from Uganda on October 1, 1990, have been slaughtering wildlife in the northern rebel-held section of L'Akagera National Park. Rwandan Government officials state that the troops have needlessly killed elephants, hippopotami, chimpanzees, rhinoceroses and lions. The rebels have also been burning the park, and it is reported that one-quarter of the park has already been destroyed.

According to the Government, the rebels' motive for the destruction is to clear the land for human settlement. The ideological leader of the invading forces, Professor Alexander Kimenyi of Sacramento State, has stated that it is unfair to preserve the national park for wildlife while some Rwandans don't have enough land to grow crops. Also, Major-General Fred Rwigema, the leader of the invading troops in Rwanda, has pledged to clear the entire National Park of wildlife and to settle Rwandan refugees now living in Uganda in that region as soon as possible.

-more-

However, the Rwandan Government states that the land, which has not been inhabited by humans for almost 150 years, is not suitable for human habitation because of the poor quality of the soil and the large presence of Tse-Tse flies and other insects which carry diseases which may be fatal to humans.

Specifically, the rebels have slaughtered 20 of only 42 elephants living in the park. These elephants are part of a research project being conducted by the Atlanta Zoo.

In 1975, the Rwandan Government, working jointly with the World Wildlife Fund and the African Wildlife Foundation, developed a program to relocate elephants living in a densely populated area near Kigali, the capital city -- where both the elephants' survival and agricultural production were threatened -- to the northern region of L'Akagora National Park. The adult elephants were eliminated and 25 young elephants were transported by helicopter to the northern region of L'Akagora, where they have lived, prospered and reproduced for 15 years. The Atlanta Zoo has been studying the project, which it is hoped will serve as a model for solving similar wildlife problems throughout Africa. Atlanta Zoo officials were forced to flee the region when the troops invaded the park.

Rwanda Intelligence reports also indicate that the leaders of the invasion, operating out of Uganda, are planning to launch a new front through the volcano National Park in northeastern Rwanda. That park is the home of the famous mountain gorillas

featured in the film "Gorillas in the Mist." Fighting in this region would threaten the very existence of the approximately 400 existing mountain gorillas in the world.

The Rwandan Government believes that the protection of wildlife and nature is extremely important to the eco-system and critical for the survival of Rwanda as a whole. Rwanda's President, Juvenal Habyarimana, is committed to conservation projects throughout Rwanda and he has received awards from prestigious international conservation groups for his commitment. With a population of almost 7 million people, Rwanda is the most densely populated country in sub-Saharan Africa.

"It is hoped that the friends of nature and the American Government will help prevent further destruction of our natural heritage and wildlife by putting pressure on the Ugandan government -- which is supporting the invading forces -- to reconsider their policies," said President Habyarimana after he was informed of the tragedy.

#

