

[The head of the human rights movement...]

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Abstract (Summary)

[Monique Mujawamariya] -- who escaped from Rwanda last week under Canadian diplomatic protection after avoiding government death squads -- arrived here Monday on a minister's permit for an indefinite stay.

Her three children are still in Rwanda, but Mujawamariya quietly asked reporters not to mention details about them for fear government soldiers would track them down and kill them.

Mujawamariya says that the battle in Rwanda is not an ethnic war between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi groups, but a deliberate campaign by the government army to kill dissenters.

Full Text (461 words)

MONTREAL -- Sad, thankful but still defiant, Rwandan human rights leader Monique Mujawamariya urged the United Nations on Monday to take action before "only killers" are left in her country.

Mujawamariya -- who escaped from Rwanda last week under Canadian diplomatic protection after avoiding government death squads -- arrived here Monday on a minister's permit for an indefinite stay.

She told reporters she was stunned to be alive, while a "multitude" of her colleagues had perished. And she vowed to "continue to fight" from Canada.

Her three children are still in Rwanda, but Mujawamariya quietly asked reporters not to mention details about them for fear government soldiers would track them down and kill them.

"It is a problem that preoccupies me enormously."

After civil war erupted almost two weeks ago, Mujawamariya watched soldiers drag her neighbors from their homes and shoot them. She was on the phone to a friend and colleague in Buffalo, N.Y., when they burst into her house.

She escaped out the back, hiding for hours in her garden, then snuck into a hiding place in her attic. After four days, she bluffed her way past soldiers with a picture of her ex-husband, a senior Rwandan army officer.

On Monday, she thanked the Canadian government and the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development in Montreal for helping in the next step of her escape.

Designated as an "honorary Canadian," she was allowed on an international relief flight.

"From the bottom of my heart I want to thank Canadians. . . . It is very difficult for me to say what I feel towards the Canadian government, which didn't hesitate after the interventions of my friends at the centre to accept that I be evacuated as a Canadian."

In 1992, Mujawamariya helped organized the visit of an international commission of human rights monitors to Rwanda. A week before the delegation arrived, she was involved in a car "accident" that left her face badly scarred.

Despite severe pain, she worked with the commission as planned. As members were about to board a plane back to Europe, the chief torturer for the Rwandan secret police came up and whispered that she would soon be a dead woman.

In the Rwandan capital of Kigali, fighting continued for the 12th day Monday. There were reports that smiling gunmen had begun killing the wounded.

Mujawamariya says that the battle in Rwanda is not an ethnic war between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi groups, but a deliberate campaign by the government army to kill dissenters.

Ed Broadbent, president of the International Centre for Human Rights, echoed her call for UN action.

"The UN must not abandon Rwanda. At a time when more troops and more equipment are urgently needed, the UN must not pull out."