

**Document 53** (16.12.96)

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## **One Rwandan is Home, Happy. Aid Workers Helping Countless Thousands that Follow**

New York and Rukira, Rwanda, Dec. 16, 1996 -- "It's beyond imagination to be home," said the Rwandan refugee. Someone was living in the house he left two years ago, but he could wait for that, he told Lutheran World Relief's Joseph Sprunger today in Rukira, southeastern Rwanda.

Back in Tanzania, militant refugees had threatened his family. With his wife and child he left quietly anyway, and now the Tanzanian army was closing the refugee camps they left. At the border, a day's walk from his village, as many as 15,000 refugees per hour were returning to Rwanda from Tanzania. Like him, about half of the Rwandans encamped in Tanzania are from Kibungo district. Three hundred thousand strong, they will outnumber local residents if they all return now.

Sprunger reports that Lutheran World Federation has stockpiled 30,000 blankets, high energy biscuits and cookware for thousands of these families. Eighty staff are assisting returnees there with immediate needs and are prepared to help them rebuild homes and schools in the future. LWF is the lead agency in the area for Action by Churches Together, an interchurch aid coalition including Lutheran World Relief.

Like the throng that returned to Rwanda from Zaire last month, each person that crosses the border from Tanzania is ending an exile that began in 1994. The Lutheran World Federation in Tanzania provided water and fuel for

many in the camps during that exile. It was one of only three relief agencies allowed access to the refugees by Tanzanian authorities during the dramatic events of recent days (see next story).

How returnees fare now will determine whether or not the current mass homecoming is in fact a breakthrough in the crisis that has destabilized central Africa. Reports from those who have returned to other areas of Rwanda indicate that officials of Rwanda's Tutsi-dominated government are acting with restraint. Among 77,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees who returned from Burundi to Butare, Rwanda, in July, about one percent have been arrested in connection with the massacres of 1994, according to a local U.N. human rights official.

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## **Tanzania, Aid Workers Face "We Would Rather Die" Movement Among Rwandan**

New York and Ngara, Tanzania, Dec. 16 -- A long-expected chapter of the Rwandan refugee saga is unfolding in Tanzania. Rwandan refugees there are flooding toward home, but under duress. Tanzanian soldiers nudge them onward. Near the Rusumo River a ten-mile column is backed up at the bridge that many of these same people crossed in April and May of 1994. Lutheran World Federation workers provide aid and transport where they can.

"We would rather die in Tanzania than go back and be killed in Rwanda" is still in the minds of many now on the move. It was a refrain heard increasingly last week after Tanzania's government decreed that the Rwandans must go home by year's end. Then, in a matter of hours, 320,000 refugees began to move -- not homeward but deeper into Tanzania, urged by militants among them. They headed for Kenya, Uganda or Malawi, telling aid workers that anywhere was better than Rwanda. The militants fear reprisals for the Rwandan genocide of 1994, and have used the refugees for protection.

The departures were orderly, but Lutheran World Relief-related workers in the camps estimated that perhaps half the refugees would have gone home then if they could.

Although groups of militants have pressed on away from the border, the main refugee columns were soon stopped by Tanzanian soldiers and herded back

toward Rwanda. Some refugees are reporting that the Tanzanian authorities have used tear gas to prompt the return.

The Tanzanian camps have been tense since last month's mass repatriation of Rwandans from Zaire. The militant refrain and rumors that death awaits returnees in Rwanda echo what relief workers heard often among Rwandan refugees in Zaire. Nevertheless, the 600,000 who returned from Zaire to Rwanda last month are resettling with minimal reports of trouble so far. LWF is providing them with rations and building materials in certain communities, as it will the new returnees from Tanzania.

*Source: Lutheran World Relief*

*Date: 15 Aug 1997*

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## **Robberies Hit Aid Agencies in Rwanda**

New York, August 15, 1997 -- Armed men robbed the Rwanda headquarters of Lutheran World Federation last week in Kigali. The long-time Lutheran World Relief partner agency lost over \$10,000 in cash and a computer when thieves tricked security guards to gain entrance to the LWF compound. One of the intruders and a getaway vehicle were linked to the Rwandan army, according to eyewitness reports. Rwandan authorities are investigating the incident.

Another aid agency's offices in Kigali were robbed in a similar incident in July. Other humanitarian agencies in the capital are now taking new security measures.

Meanwhile, continuing insecurity severely limits movement in the northwestern region of Rwanda. Some 2,000 civilians have been killed there during army reprisals against insurgents in May and June, according to a recent United Nations report. LWF's work in reconstruction and community rehabilitation, in Rwanda's south and east, has not been directly affected by the violence.