

'THE BUNGLED WARNINGS'; Ugandans failed to pass on threats from rebels say tour firms

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771 words

3 March 1999

The Evening Standard

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English

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RWANDAN rebels threatened to kill British and American tourists two weeks before the massacre in Uganda but the authorities failed to pass on the warnings, it emerged today.

A London-based tour firm insisted that the killings could have been avoided if Ugandan authorities had acted on a letter that named the region where the murders happened and said both British and American tourists were at risk.

Wayne Moore, a project coordinator with **Encounter Overland**, said the warnings had first been made in a letter sent to the Ugandan tourist office two weeks ago, and had now been repeated.

"In the new letters, they have written that they have done what they said they would do by attacking British and Americans and anyone involved with them - and that they will do it again," said Mr Moore, at his hotel in Kibale, 60 miles from the danger zone. Mr Moore was speaking as he oversaw a party of 10, mostly British, tourists.

A team of FBI agents arrived in Uganda today and Scotland Yard was standing by to send detectives to the region. A Foreign Office spokesman said: "We have been in discussions with Scotland Yard and the Ugandan authorities and will be deciding later today whether to send investigating officers to Uganda."

The Hutu extremists who hacked to death eight tourists, including four Britons, attached messages to the bodies apparently warning the West not to back the Tutsi government in neighbouring Rwanda.

Details about precisely what happened in the area of jungle, which became widely known through the 1988 film

Gorillas In The Mist, were still emerging today.

The crisis began at dawn on Sunday when tourist camps were attacked by around 120 Hutu rebels thought to belong to the notorious Interahamwe militia behind the genocide of 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda five years ago.

They struck three tourist bases in the Bwindi National Park of southwest Uganda, one of the last remaining habitats of rare mountain gorillas.

Seventeen of the 31 tourists escaped or were freed shortly afterwards.

However, 14 others were frogmarched towards nearby Congo and eight of them bludgeoned or hacked to death before the end of the day.

The victims included Mark Lindgren, 23, a university graduate from St Albans, Steven Roberts, a shop worker from Edinburgh, and New Zealander Rhonda Avis, 27. Her British-New Zealand dual national husband Mark, also 27, was freed along with Canadian Mitchell Keiver.

Also killed were New Zealander Michelle Strathern and Americans Rob Haubner and his wife Susan Miller. The identities of the other victims are not yet known.

The other six hostages were freed with a message warning the international community to cut off all ties with Rwanda's Tutsi government.

It warned of an attempt to destabilise Uganda and to let the world know there was a war on.

Notes attached to some bodies read: "Americans and British, we don't want you on our land. You support our enemy." One of the survivors, American safari leader Mark Ross, said the terrorists were specifically targeting Britons and Americans.

He contradicted reports that there had been a battle with security forces, saying he had not come across any Ugandan troops until 40 minutes after he was released.

Mr Ross told a Press conference at the American embassy in Kampala what happened after the tourists were kidnapped.

Three women were unable to keep up. The attackers said they would escort them to safety but Mr Ross later came across the bodies of two of them.

He said: "The women had been killed on the spot. It looked like one was raped prior to being killed." Mr Ross could not be sure of their nationalities but one was an American.

Later, the attackers separated off three men, apparently at random who were then killed. "Their heads were crushed and there were deep slashes with pangas machetes," said Mr Ross.

The survivors flew back to Kampala on Monday morning. Today they are being guarded at the British High Commission. The Government is asking for clarification from the Ugandan authorities as to whether there was in fact a bungled rescue attempt.

In a statement to the House of Commons, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said: "We are seeking urgent clarification from the Ugandan authorities of the circumstances in which these deaths took place.

"It is not yet clear whether the Ugandan military intervened directly, but if that is confirmed we will want an immediate explanation of how this happened despite assurances we were given."

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