

Film explores history of Rwandan genocide

KIGALI, Rwanda (AP) - Ten years after watching families and friends die in the Rwandan genocide, survivors of the slaughter are recreating the horror - this time as cast and crew of a film shot on location in the land where the killings occurred.

"I am afraid to say this is a true story," said Raoul Peck, writer-director of "Sometimes in April," an HBO film shot where more than 500,000 Tutsis and political moderates from the Hutu majority were slaughtered in 100 days.

Set in Rwanda, Washington, and Paris, the film looks at the genocide and the stunning bravery of its victims through the eyes of one family.

It shows the indifference of a world that dismissed the genocide as routine African bloodshed, said Peck, who spent 18 months researching in Rwanda and Tanzania, where masterminds of the genocide are still on trial at a U.N. tribunal.

The Haitian-born filmmaker agreed to write and direct the film on the condition that it is shot in Rwanda.

"I felt we could make a film in which the Rwandan people can recognize themselves and participate at every level ... that it make sense to the people here first and then to the rest of the world," Peck told The Associated Press.

He said it was difficult to decide to go ahead with the film because of the lack of film infrastructure, but he added: "After many months here, we are convinced filming in Rwanda was the right thing to do."

The movie's set is a half-

mile away from where skeletal remains of 250,000 victims are buried in tombs and exhibited in glass cases. To create authentic scenes, genocide survivors working as cast and crew detailed their personal experiences.

"Sometime we go somewhere and somebody just says 'Yes, I was hiding for two months behind this house' or 'My uncle died a street from there,'" said Peck, who also directed "Lumumba," the 2000 film about Congo's assassinated Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. "It is just a daily occurrence."

"Sometimes in April the rains come in Rwanda," said Sam Martin, the HBO executive in charge of production, citing the film's title, a Rwandan saying recalling the blessings of rain.

But April of 1994 brought genocide. Victims were chased into churches, maize fields, banana plantations and swamps and hacked to death by machete-wielding neighbors, soldiers and militiamen.

A team of psychologists is on the set to help genocide survivors deal with trauma that may be triggered by graphic reminders of the past. In one incident, the special-effects crew scattered fake cadavers in a swamp outside the capital of Kigali that had been a killing ground and hiding place for Tutsis.

The scene was too real for a village woman who wandered to the set and saw more than a dozen silicone corpses. She screamed and sobbed, overcoming the shock only with a psychologist's help.

"Sometimes in April" tells the story of Hutu Capt. Augustin Muganza who is forced to relive the genocide

when he receives a letter from his brother detained in Arusha, Tanzania, for his role as a broadcaster at an extremist radio station that spurred on the killings with propaganda.

Muganza, now a teacher, is reluctant to agree to his brother's request to visit him at the U.N. tribunal investigating the genocide.

But his new girlfriend presses him to go and deal with a troubled past that includes the unknown fate of his Tutsi wife and children and a devastating death of his former friend and comrade in the army.

The film shows a senior U.S. official wrestling with her convictions to stop the genocide while working for an administration reluctant to take on a new African conflict soon after 18 U.S. troops were killed in another African nation, Somalia.

"Sometimes in April," slated for release next year, is one of four movies in production on the Rwandan genocide. One of them, "Hotel Rwanda," now being shot in South Africa, tells the true story of Paul Rusesabagina, a Hutu hotel manager pressed by his Tutsi wife to save more than 1,200 people.

Peck said "Sometimes in April" includes a few composite characters of several people he met. But "every single line of this film, of the screenplay, is authentic and based on facts."

He added: "How the characters evolve in the 10 years of the duration of the film ... how they cope with the past, how the past is still present in their daily lives, what they do to react to that ... It is a witness to the Rwanda of today."

Nigeria awaits vaccines

KANO, Nigeria (AP) - A mainly Muslim state in northern Nigeria said Sunday it won't join a nationwide polio immunization campaign next week because the alternative vaccines it ordered from abroad have not arrived. Kano is the only state in Nigeria still refusing polio vaccine.

President Olusegun Obasanjo is scheduled Monday to kick off a week of emergency immunization in Gusau, capital of neighboring Zamfara state. Zamfara was until Thursday the only other state objecting to the polio vaccines.

"We're not joining tomorrow, we will only join when we receive uncontaminated vaccines or when our own vaccines arrive," Kano spokesman Sule Ya'u Sule told The Associated Press on Sunday.

Sule said he wasn't sure when the vaccines ordered from unidentified Muslim nations in Asia would arrive.

Several states in Nigeria's predominantly Islamic north suspended polio immuniza-

tion campaigns between October and February following rumors spread by radical Muslim preachers the vaccines were laced with agents that could cause AIDS, cancer and infertility. They claimed it was part of a U.S. plot.

Kano authorities insist tests conducted by its own panel of scientists showed the vaccines were contaminated with a variant of the hormone estrogen, which they said would cause infertility in women.

The government ordered a series of independent tests on the controversial vaccines abroad and Obasanjo said Friday the tests proved the vaccines were safe. Other states, including Zamfara, accepted the results.

International health experts say Kano state is the main remaining reservoir of the polio virus in Nigeria, from where strains have re-infected previously polio-free areas in the country, as well as eight west and central African nations.

Rwanda releases 4,500 felons to relieve jam-packed facilities

Special to Sentinel-Voice

(IRIN) — At least 4,500 common law prisoners were pardoned and released in Rwanda on Monday in a bid to decongest the nation's prisons, Prosecutor General Jean de Dieu Mucyo told IRIN.

"This group of the released exclude those who have confessed to genocide crimes," he said on Monday.

Those released included the elderly and the sick, as well as those who had been in prison longer than the sentences they could face. Mucyo said those who confessed to participating in the 1994 genocide, in which some 800,000 Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus were killed, would probably be released next week.

The released prisoners are to be sent to "solidarity camps" for two months where they will undergo re-education in the government's new programs on reconciliation and on the workings of the

Gacaca traditional courts that are to try alleged genocide perpetrators.

Mucyo said 200 minors aged 14 to 18 years, among those released, would be sent to separate camps where they would receive special programs.

In early March, the government announced that it would free the common law criminals and that at least half of the country's prisoners had confessed to their role in the genocide. The government also extended by one year a 15 March deadline for detainees to confess their role

in the genocide, thereby enabling more of them to be granted clemency.

In February 2003, close to 25,000 prisoners who had pleaded guilty to participating in the genocide were provisionally released from detention centers. The release plan comes as Rwanda prepares to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the genocide in April. In Kenya last December, President Mwai Kibaki ordered the release of over 11,546 prisoners in order to decongest his country's overcrowded prisons.

Senegal chief honored

Special to Sentinel-Voice from IPS/GIN

Senegal's President Abdoulaye Wade has won the 2004 International League of Human Rights (ILHR) award, confirmed an ILHR spokesman Monday.

The presidential office released a statement saying the award praised Wade for a life-time of commitment to furthering human rights.

It also said that the 36th annual International Human Rights Award would be presented later this year in New York, where ILHR is based.

Last year's award went to Taiwan's President Chen Shui-ban. The ILHR, founded in 1941, claims to be the world's oldest human rights advocacy organization.

Wade is credited with improving the human rights in Senegal since being elected in 2001, ending 40 years of socialist rule.

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