

# Belgian paras unable to land in stricken Rwanda

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BRUSSELS, April 10 (Reuter) - Belgium said crack paratroops ordered to Rwanda as part of an international force to protect and evacuate foreigners from its former African colony were unable to land in the stricken capital Kigali.

Belgium has 1,500 nationals – the biggest contingent of foreign nationals – in the tiny central African state where many thousands of people are reported to have died in renewed civil war and ethnic strife.

But a military spokesman said the 800 paratroops, who left Brussels on Saturday, could not land at Kigali because the airport was not secure and would fly instead to neighbouring countries such as Burundi.

Colonel Freddy Van de Weghe told Reuters the Rwandan government had dropped earlier objections to the arrival of Belgian troops at Kigali airport, where 400 French soldiers are already in position.

But he said it was not sure whether Rwandan armed forces at the airport would accept reassurances from the government that the paratroops could land there. “Our analysis is that at the moment we don’t have a green light,” he said.

One civilian Boeing 747 carrying Belgian troops was heading for Nairobi, other officials said.

Although French forces landed in Kigali early on Saturday, they did not secure the airport and more than 300 U.S. Marines were directed instead to Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi.

However, the French troops have already begun flying out some of the 600 French nationals in Rwanda.

The fighting erupted in Kigali after the assassination of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in a rocket attack on their plane last Wednesday.

The country has been gripped by four years of ethnic strife pitting the majority Hutu tribe against the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels of the minority Tutsi.

The Hutus accuse Belgium of covertly supporting the RPF, which has its main office in Brussels – hence the government’s reservations about the arrival of the troops. Belgium insists that it has remained neutral in the conflict.

Colonel Luc Marchal, commander of Belgian troops serving as part of a 2,500-strong U.N. mission already in Rwanda, said government forces blocked the airport runway with fire trucks after the French troops arrived.

The rebels, who have vowed to smash the interim government and are sending forces towards the capital, warned France, Belgium and the United States

to limit their troop deployments.

“The Rwanda Patriotic Front will not give any warning to those who seek to transform what they claim as humanitarian missions into military assistance for autocratic regimes which are close to the end,” said a statement issued in Brussels.

Relief workers say tens of thousands of people, including political leaders, nuns and priests, have been killed in the fighting.

Ten Belgian soldiers with the U.N. force were killed on Thursday, trying in vain to protect Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe Unilingyimana. They were disarmed and shot and she was also killed as she tried to flee.

Some of the troops preparing to leave on Saturday were from the same unit, based at Flawinne near the city of Namur.

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