

# France sends troops to violence-torn Rwanda

Reuters, April 9, 1994

PARIS, April 9 (Reuter) - France has sent troops to Kigali to help prepare for the evacuation of French nationals after two days of tribal bloodletting in the Rwandan capital, the Foreign Ministry said on Saturday.

The ministry issued a statement as United Nations officials and diplomats in New York reported that three French planes had landed at Kigali airport.

The statement said the decision to send soldiers to the central African country had been taken "in the face of the spread and the worsening of the violence in Kigali".

The aim was "to provide the security necessary for a possible evacuation of the French nationals".

A ministry spokeswoman said the 600-odd French nationals in Rwanda who wanted to leave would be given the chance to do so.

"We have taken necessary steps to allow those of our countrymen who wish to leave to do so, and the taking of control of the (Kigali) airport is a first phase aiming to permit such departures," the spokeswoman said.

The situation in Kigali remained tense and precarious, the spokeswoman said.

Other officials said shooting had resumed after a period of calm, and that rebels had infiltrated the city. "The calm is not likely to last much longer," one official said.

The French government did not say how many soldiers were involved in the evacuation operation or give any other details.

Igbal Riza, deputy head of U.N. peacekeeping operations, told Reuters in New York that three French aircraft had landed in Kigali, but he had no further details.

Diplomats calculated that each aircraft carried up to 50 soldiers, meaning the French force numbered about 150 men.

There are about 600 French nationals in Rwanda, most of them residing in Kigali. Belgium, which has put its paratroopers on alert, has 1,500 nationals in its former colony.

The diplomats said the French operation was designed to open the airport so that other countries, such as Belgium and the United States, could send evacuation planes.

Belgium also sent troops to Rwanda on Saturday as part of an international force to evacuate foreigners.

The French troops were believed to have been sent from the Central African Republic, where France has about 1,300 soldiers, five Jaguar fighter-bombers and three Transall C-160 transport planes.

France, which for several years had about 300 soldiers in Rwanda, withdrew its remaining contingent last December. They were replaced by U.N. troops. France still has a small number of military technical advisers in Rwanda and Burundi.

The violence erupted after Rwanda's President Juvenal Habyarimana and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of neighbouring Burundi were killed on Wednesday when a rocket destroyed their plane as they were landing in Kigali from a meeting in Tanzania.

Hundreds of people have been reported killed since then, including political leaders, aid workers, nuns, priests, ordinary Rwandans and 10 Belgian U.N. peacekeepers.

The United Nations has a force of 2,500 troops in Rwanda, including more than 400 Belgians.

(c) Reuters Limited 1994