

French evacuation from Rwanda virtually complete

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PARIS, April 11 (Reuter) - France has evacuated most of its nationals from Rwanda and will decide later on Monday when to pull its troops out of the war-torn central African country, the foreign ministry said.

Ministry spokesman Richard Duque told reporters that 620 French people had left Rwanda, most of them aboard French military planes.

"There are still some French people there, and we are helping foreigners in difficulty in Kigali," Duque said.

Senegal's President Abdou Diouf, on an official visit to Paris, asked France to evacuate 15 Senegalese with the United Nations peacekeeping force.

Among some 30 French nationals left in Rwanda were a few isolated tourists stranded in areas of fighting which could only be reached by helicopter and religious workers who had chosen to stay.

Duque said the 500 French soldiers were in Rwanda on a strictly humanitarian mission and Paris would decide later in the day when to pull them out.

France has said its soldiers will not intervene in the fighting and will leave as soon as Westerners have been evacuated.

But Duque said the French embassy was still operating and that France was ready to contribute if necessary to talks between the rival forces in Rwanda.

Western nations rushed to get their nationals out of Rwanda after an orgy of tribal violence unleashed by the killing of President Juvenal Habyarimana last week.

The troops involved in France's rescue operation, codenamed "Amaryllis", did not take helicopters to Rwanda. They have been using five Transall C-160 transport planes flown in from France, Bangui, N'Djamena and Libreville for the evacuation.

The defence ministry said the soldiers used rubbish trucks to drive to an orphanage run by French nuns 10 km (six miles) from Kigali and rescue 100 children.

Some of the children, in the process of being adopted by families in France, were due in Paris later in the day.

"Some of them have seen war two or three times. They have seen many dead," a priest accompanying them told French radio.

A first group of 43 French citizens evacuated from Kigali arrived at Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris late on Sunday.

Wrapped in green airline blankets, some said they remained holed up at home in terror through the fighting until French soldiers arrived and took them to Kigali airport.

Others said the Westerners' neighbourhoods were spared and they did not witness any violence. They kept in touch through a radio network set up by the French embassy after tribal clashes in the city four years ago.

Some prominent Rwandans took refuge at the French embassy and Cooperation Minister Michel Roussin said they would be protected.

Rwanda's ambassador in Paris appealed for "massive help" for people affected by the fighting, but said that calm was gradually returning to Kigali.

"The forces of order are firmly neutralising the last groups of pillagers and other criminals," ambassador Jean-Marie Vianney Ndagijimana said in a statement.

Nathalie Feuillet, a doctor in Kigali with Medecins Sans Frontieres, told France-Info radio the charity was evacuating all serious casualties because surgeons could not operate.

She said the main hospital was "a big charnel-house with many, many dead and a few patients, some 50 or so. Most of them are very seriously injured and cannot wait for surgery."

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