

U.N. says Rwanda rebels tightening grip on Kigali

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UNITED NATIONS, April 12 (Reuter) - The rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) appears to be tightening its grip on Kigali, the Rwandan capital, and the evacuation of foreigners has been virtually completed, the president of the Security Council said late Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters after private council consultations, Colin Keating of New Zealand said : "The RPF faction seems to be increasingly in control of the situation on the ground in Kigali."

The U.N. force in Rwanda had reported that "the evacuation of foreign nationals is virtually complete and that it has been possible to obtain safe conduct for that evacuation process from all the combatants," Keating said.

French troops controlling the airport to facilitate the evacuation were likely to be withdrawn within a few days, he added, quoting the U.N. Secretariat and the French U.N. envoy, Jean-Bernard Merimee.

The level of fighting in the city, especially involving heavy weapons, had been reduced, but there were still pockets where it was continuing.

"Various elements of the previous regime have departed the capital. It is uncertain whether they have departed to regroup or whether this is a total abandonment of the city," Keating said.

The RPF, meanwhile, continued to refuse to negotiate with any other factions and the only remaining radio station operating in the city was "urging ... action against foreigners, which is particularly unwelcome," the council president added.

He said the Security Council would have to make decisions within the next few days on the future of the 2,500-strong U.N. Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), dispatched last year to help implement an accord signed in Arusha, Tanzania, by the Rwandan government and the RPF.

"Those decisions will be based on the extent to which the council can be persuaded, not by words but by the action of the people on the ground, that there is a reasonable basis for a broad-based government being established, based on the principles of the Arusha accords," Keating said.

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