

Belgian U.N. peacekeepers disgusted by Rwanda mission

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BRUSSELS, April 18 (Reuter) - Belgian U.N. peacekeepers said on Monday they were disgusted by their mission in Rwanda in which 10 of their colleagues were killed.

Many of them witnessed massacres of civilians without being able to intervene because the U.N. rules of engagement allowed them to fire only in self-defence.

"I'm... disgusted to have been with the U.N.," one soldier told VTM television. "We've already ripped all our U.N. badges off and burned our berets."

"We couldn't do anything but watch," a second peacekeeper said.

Another cut his beret to pieces with an army knife in front of television cameras.

The U.N. soldiers' peacekeeping mandate also prevented them from trying to free the 10 Belgians who were killed after they were surrounded and disarmed by Rwandan government troops.

"They must change the (U.N.) mandate," said a fourth soldier, adding that the Belgians' weapons had been too light.

The first 43 peacekeepers of a contingent of 420 returned to Belgium on Monday. They were accompanied by 150 paratroopers, the first of a contingent of 750 sent to Rwanda to evacuate Belgians and other foreigners.

Belgium announced its withdrawal from the U.N.'s Rwanda operation after the 10 were killed while trying to guard the prime minister in an orgy of violence which erupted after President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a rocket attack on a plane on April 6.

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