

Rights body says Rwanda death toll may be 100,000

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UNITED NATIONS, April 19 (Reuter) - A leading human rights group said Tuesday as many as 100,000 people may have been killed in civil war-torn Rwanda over the past two weeks.

In a letter to Security Council President Colin Keating of New Zealand, Human Rights Watch said : "At this time, the atrocities have spread, and international humanitarian organisations have estimated that there may have been as many as 100,000 killed in the past two weeks."

The carnage followed the April 6 downing of a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of neighbouring Burundi as they were about to land in Kigali, the capital.

Human Rights Watch said the campaign of killing was planned weeks before Habyarimana's death, "when army officers trained, armed and organised some 1,700 young men into a militia affiliated with the president's political party."

It said the Rwandan defence ministry also made broadcasts attacking the political opposition and inciting violence against civilians sympathetic to the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), making clear it was referring to members of the Tutsi tribe.

Immediate after the president's death, the army and militia "engaged in targeted killings of political opponents of the regime, including both Hutu and Tutsi human rights activists and moderates within the government, including the prime minister."

Human Rights Watch also said the Rwandan authorities had cut telephone links with the rest of the world in the past 48 hours.

U.N. sources said Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was expected to make a recommendation to the Security Council Wednesday on the future of the 2,000-man U.N. Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), deployed last year to help implement an agreement meant to end three years of civil war between the government and the RPF.

The options are to leave the force intact and give it a new mandate; leave only a small token force; or carry out a complete withdrawal. Council members said last week they did not intend abandoning Rwanda.

A U.N. official who briefed council members Tuesday said the situation in Kigali was deteriorating. He said a shell landed on the UNAMIR building but

did not explode.

A spokesman for the RPF, Claude Dusaidi, told reporters at the United Nations he was “beginning to smell racism in these corridors” as the reason for the world body’s failure to stop the killings.

He said genocide was taking place in Rwanda on a scale not seen elsewhere and contrasted the inaction with what he said was done “when the Germans committed crimes of genocide in the Second World War ... when in Yugoslavia there were acts of genocide.”

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