

Boutros-Ghali wanted larger U.N. presence in Rwanda

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UNITED NATIONS, April 22 (Reuter) - Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali would have preferred a beefed-up U.N. operation in Rwanda but realised the Security Council felt differently, his spokesman said Friday.

The council voted late Thursday to cut back the beleaguered peacekeeping force, once at 2,500, to about 270 to help negotiate a truce in the country's bloody civil war.

The secretary-general apparently was smarting from continued criticism by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and humanitarian groups that the United Nations was deserting thousands of Rwandans it was guarding around the country.

Before the vote, Boutros-Ghali had proposed that the force should either be substantially strengthened to restore order in the central African country or be reduced to the bare minimum. But he did not give his preference.

Nevertheless, his spokesman Joe Sills said "he presented the options in the order he would have preferred them. He would have preferred an increase in the U.N. Assistance Mission for Rwanda," known as UNAMIR.

"But it was clear to everyone there was not enough support on the council to have that happen," Sills added.

Sills said it would have been impossible for the current force to have dealt with the crisis "on a continuing basis."

A spokesman for Doctors Without Borders told reporters Friday that only his group and the International Committee of the Red Cross - and not the U.N. relief agencies - had substantial relief operations in Rwanda.

The spokesman, Dr Alain Destexhe, contended that Rwanda was not Somalia and foreigners were not targets, except for Belgians, the former colonial rulers.

"We would like the humanitarian part of the United Nations much more active," he said.

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.

Immediately after the presidents' death, the Hutu army and militia engaged in targeted killings of political opponents of the regime, both Hutu and minority Tutsi tribe activists, including Rwanda's prime minister.

Human Rights Watch, which said earlier that as many as 100,000 people may have been killed, said Friday that 20,000 to 25,000 Rwandans under U.N. protection would face “almost certain death.”

“The mass slaughter being carried out by the presidential guard and government-trained militias is now directed almost exclusively at members of the Tutsi minority group, and amounts to a campaign of genocide,” it said in a statement.

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