

Air cargo mercy flights help Rwandan refugees

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LONDON, May 9 (Reuter) - The provision of a mobile airport unit at Mwanza in Tanzania last Thursday has so far enabled 12 cargo flights to land with emergency supplies for refugees from war-torn Rwanda, said the U.K. Overseas Development Administration (ODA).

The ODA said it transported the unit from Kent International Airport last Wednesday on a 40-tonne capacity IL-76 freighter wet-leased from Russian carrier Dobrolet Airlines. Wet-leasing covers the hire of both plane and crew.

"At Mwanza, there is just a concrete landing and take-off strip in the bush. We flew out the mobile airport unit to allow relief supplies arriving to be unloaded without them being damaged," said ODA emergency aid spokeswoman Tansin Leakey.

She added that the flight, costing 200,000 stg, carried a device known as a "high unloader", which enables cargo pallets to be safely unloaded from large aircraft with side cargo doors onto trucks.

"Since it arrived, at least 12 flights have landed at Mwanza carrying relief supplies, which have been safely unloaded. These flights have been organised by agencies including the Red Cross, Oxfam and the United Nations Commission for Refugees," said Leakey. "More flights will arrive daily," she added.

Apart from the high unloader, last week's ODA flight also carried a machine that helps re-start aircraft engines, mobile battery-charged power units for aircraft, mobile tractors to pull cargo, and satellite telephones," said Leakey.

Mwanza airport in north-west Tanzania is the closest to the Rwanda border at which large freighter aircraft can land, she said.

Leakey added that the ODA had so far given 1.1 million stg to organisations such as Oxfam and Save the Children in order to help Rwandan refugees and would shortly allocate a further two million stg to this cause.

For more than a month Rwanda has been engulfed by tribal killings sparked by the death of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and the Burundian president in a rocket attack on their plane at Kigali airport on April 6.

More than 200,000 people are estimated to have been killed in massacres, mostly of Tutsis by Hutu troops and militiamen, across the central African state since the killing of the Hutu president.

Rebels have advanced on Kigali's Kanombe airport in Rwanda since last Wednesday, threatening to cut the only air link with the outside world for the

270-strong U.N. force and relief agencies in Rwanda. Only one U.N. flight has landed at Kigali since last Thursday.

Air France recently switched its Rwandan flights to Burundi. It has been involved in carrying emergency supplies such as medical equipment flown on behalf of French medical agency Medecins Sans Frontieres. – Air Cargo Newsroom Tel + 44 71 324 8982; Fax + 44 71 510 5017

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