

France calls on Rwandan rebels to talk, envisages peacekeepers

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France calls on Rwandan rebels to talk, envisages peacekeepers afpr000020011028dq5502i86 572 Mots 05 Mai 1994 Agence France-Presse Anglais (Copyright 1994)

PARIS, May 5 (AFP) – The French government on Thursday condemned Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels for rejecting talks with the Kigali government and a ceasefire to end ethnic slaughter in the central African country.

France is "concerned" at the failure of a UN peace bid in Arusha, Tanzania, and "deplores the RPF's refusal not only to enter talks with the other party but above all to envisage an end to fighting," foreign ministry spokesman Richard Duque said.

The government "reiterates its support" for peace initiatives in the region, particularly that of Tanzania, and calls on the "actors on the Rwandan stage to face up to their responsibilities" and "end the massacres," he said.

Heavy fighting raged on Thursday in Kigali between the rebels and government troops after a month of ethnic slaughter among the minority Tutsis and the Hutu majority which has claimed more than 100,000 lives.

The United Nations suspended flights to the capital after a mortar round hit the airport, preventing a relief plane from unloading and the aircraft came under small arms fire in an apparent deliberate attack, according to a senior UN official in Kigali.

France favours maintaining an international presence through the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), Duque stressed.

UNAMIR deployed to oversee implementation of a peace accord signed between the mainly Hutu government and the Tutsi-backed RPF in Arusha last

August. Its numbers were cut back from 2,500 to just 270 after renewed bloodletting broke out after the Rwandan president, Juvenal Habyarimana, was killed on April 6, when his plane was downed apparently in a rocket attack.

In Arusha, the RPF has said it will talk to the Rwandan military but not to what it described as a "government of killers" formed two days after the death of the head of state.

Paris has asked its ambassador in Kigali, Jean-Michel Marlaud, to contact all the Rwandan parties and regional leaders concerned in an "evaluation and contact mission" to help solve the crisis.

"The sending of an international force to Rwanda can only be effective if a ceasefire is concluded among the parties and if they begin to talk," Duque said.

He added that consultations were currently under way at the United Nations in New York, where France has been pressing for international intervention.

On Wednesday, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe told parliament : "At this very moment, at the Security Council where France is active, we are up against strong reservations from many of our partners over sending a United Nations force."

"The preference seems to be going in that respect to the OAU (Organisation of African Unity)," Juppe added.

The United States, unwilling to renew its experience in sending troops to Somalia, has indicated that it will help fund African military intervention on the lines of the Nigerian-led ECOMOG force operating in Liberia.

In private in Paris, however, some French officials said that ECOMOG had not proved very successful and charged that the multi-national force had

failed to remain neutral in the Liberian civil war. A Liberian peace deal was signed last August and elections are due to be held this year.

France has released 10 million francs (1.8 million dollars) in aid for the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled the carnage in Rwanda, mainly to neighbouring Tanzania, Duque said.