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NZ pushes for humanitarian operation in Rwanda

New Zealand proposals form the basis of a resolution before the Security Council to approve a humanitarian relief operation in Rwanda, Foreign Minister Don McKinnon said.

"The proposal before the Security Council is for a UN force of around 5,500 whose task would be to protect the civilian population and provide security for relief operations.

"Regional African countries are expected to make up much of the new force," Mr McKinnon said.

The original UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda was reduced in April because of the danger to personnel and the fact that it could no longer do the task it was sent to do.

"A small presence was maintained as an intermediary between the parties, in efforts to get a ceasefire. Countries like Tanzania have also worked hard to achieve this.

"A strengthened UN operation will continue crucial efforts to get a ceasefire, and at the same time provide the protection desperately needed for the civilian population," Mr McKinnon said.

Since President Habyarimana's plane was shot down last month, Rwanda has tumbled into chaos and genocidal killing.

Mr Rider

Estimates put the number of deaths as high as 200,000. Another 1.2 million people have fled their homes, and refugees have poured into neighbouring countries.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, major aid donors and international non-governmental organisations are helping. Last week New Zealand gave emergency assistance of \$300,000.

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