

Belgium plans to protect nationals in Rwanda

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BRUSSELS, April 8 (Reuter) - Belgium said on Friday it was planning ways to protect its nationals in Rwanda after 10 Belgian U.N. peacekeeping troops were killed in an eruption of violence in the central African country.

A Defence Ministry statement said the 10 peacekeepers had been in charge of the security of Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, also killed in Thursday's violence.

The statement said the Belgians were "apprehended" as the prime minister tried to flee Rwandan soldiers who had surrounded her residence.

"The Belgian soldiers were disarmed, then taken to a military camp in Kigali where they were executed," it said.

A U.N. official in Rwanda had earlier reported the deaths of 11 Belgians serving with United Nations forces there.

The Belgian government announced after a late night cabinet mee-

ting that it was following events in Rwanda very closely and had contacted other governments and the United Nations about action to protect Belgian citizens in its former colony.

A statement said the cabinet had "analysed the present dramatic situation in Rwanda, particularly with a view to taking appropriate measures for the protection of our compatriots".

Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene and Foreign Minister Willy Claes, who both missed the cabinet meeting because they were out of the country, had decided to return immediately to Belgium, the statement said.

A Foreign Affairs ministry spokesman would not comment when asked whether the government was planning to evacuate its citizens from Rwanda in view of the deteriorating situation.

Asked by reporters at the United Nations in New York whether Brussels would mount a rescue operation, Belgian ambassador Paul Noter-

daeme said : “We will see, everthing is possible.

”We have to think of our role as far as the security of our own civilian people are concerned.

Belgium has about 1,500 civilian nationals in Rwanda and 1,200 in Burundi.

Defence Minister Leo Delcroix said before the cabinet meeting that an evacuation could not be ruled out.

Violence swept the Rwandan capital Kigali following the deaths of presidents Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi in a rocket attack on their plane as it flew into the city on Wednesday night.

Belgium has 428 troops with the

2,500-strong, 23-nation U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda.

Foreign Minister Claes, in a television interview on a visit to Romania, said an aircraft of the Belgian airline Sabena was on standby in the Burundian capital Bujumbura for use in evacuations if the situation got worse.

There was also a C-130 transport plane available in Kenya, and fleets of cars could be called on for a road evacuation.

Belgium expressed outrage at the deaths of the presidents and warned that it could seriously put into question the precarious balance in the two countries which have been bedevilled by violent tribal rivalries for decades.

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