

Few spared in Rwanda's killing field

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KIGALI, April 8 (Reuter) - Belgian troops stood ready on Friday to rescue foreign nationals from tribal and political butchery in Rwanda which has already claimed the lives of U.N. peacekeepers, aid workers, nuns and priests.

Residents said sporadic heavy machine gunfire echoed around the rambling hillside capital Kigali after two days of bloodletting sparked by Wednesday's killing in a rocket attack of the president and his counterpart from neighbouring Burundi.

"It is not clear who is in control, movement around the city is impossible, everybody is terrified," said Samantha Bolton, spokesperson for the medical charity Medecins sans Frontieres in Nairobi, after telephone contacts with MSF staff in Rwanda.

U.N. staff and Red Cross workers, hoping to make an assessment of the death toll, were forced to return to heavily-protected compounds by groups of machete-wielding youths and angry soldiers manning hastily-

constructed roadblocks.

"There is a lot of confusion, no-one knows what is really going on. It is a little quieter this afternoon but sporadic bursts of gunfire can still be heard," said Jane Miginiac, a teacher at the U.S.-backed English Teaching Centre.

The leader of the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), Paul Kagame, said his movement was considering a move on Kigali to restore law and order. "There is absolute anarchy. No government, no authority. We have to move to restore order if this continues," he said.

In New York, the International Rescue Committee relief organisation said 4,000 Rwandan refugees had poured across the border into neighbouring Tanzania. It predicted the refugee exodus could swell to 150,000.

Rwanda and Burundi have a bloody history of tribal rivalry pitting the majority Hutu against the Tutsi, the former feudal overlords. Tens of thousands of members of both tribes have

died in recurring bouts of ethnic bloodletting.

Relief workers said Burundi, where up to 50,000 people died in violence following the October assassination of the country's first democratically-elected Hutu president, was calm.

The latest killing in Rwanda began after President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira were killed in a rocket attack on their plane as they returned from a regional peace summit in Tanzania. Both were Hutus.

Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, a Hutu serving in a four-party coalition with Habyarimana, was killed by soldiers on Thursday and three ministers kidnapped.

The RPF said they expected heavy resistance if they advanced on Kigali where 600 rebels were reported battling government troops. The rebels, dug in around the parliament under phase one of a derailed peace accord, left their compound on Thursday and fought running battles with troops loyal to Habyarimana.

Belgium placed its paratroopers, veterans of African conflicts, on standby to evacuate foreigners from its former colony after 10 Belgian U.N. peacekeepers were killed trying to protect Uwilingiyimana.

France said it was considering using troops stationed in the Central African Republic. Foreign ministry

spokesman Richard Duque told reporters Paris was "extremely concerned" by the situation in Rwanda.

Belgium has some 1,500 nationals in the country and France around 600.

Rwandan radio broadcast an appeal from Rwanda's armed forces for public support, blaming the violence on "wrongdoers".

In the first official confirmation that Habyarimana loyalists were heavily involved, the radio said angry soldiers "escaped their barracks and attacked and harmed the population".

The armed forces cannot tolerate such shameful criminal acts, "the broadcast said". The armed forces once again urge people to be vigilant and help them stop the wrongdoers.

A dusk-to-dawn curfew has been slapped on Habyarimana's hometown of Gisenyi in the north, near the RPF frontline.

Most killings have been blamed on elite units of the Rwandan army and presidential guard, dominated by Hutu and strongly loyal to Habyarimana, who refused to share power with the Tutsi.

U.N. sources said anyone seen as anti-Habyarimana, not only pro-RPF Tutsis, risked being killed by angry soldiers.

In Rome the Jesuit order said 11 nuns and eight priests – all Tutsis – were killed at the order's Centre of Spirituality in Kigali on Thursday. It

did not say who was responsible.

"Three European Jesuits who were at the centre when the massacre took place were spared," a statement said.

Several dozen Rwandans working for international aid organisations in Kigali had been massacred, the director of the Belgian branch of the charity Medecins sans Frontieres said.

MSF director Georges Dallemagne said in Brussels that armed men, believed to be from the presidential guard, had shot the aid workers dead in front of expatriate staff.

"They went to the houses of MSF Belgium and MSF Holland, UNICEF and Oxfam, called out the local staff and shot them," he said. Expatriate staff were unharmed.

With the country in a power va-

cuum, Friday began in Kigali with the scream of mortar bombs and crackle of rifle fire.

One resident spoke of "an orgy of killings out there".

Fires raged as rebels and soldiers fought around parliament and Tutsis and Hutus fell to slaughtering each other, opening a new chapter in their history of violence that goes back decades.

"They fight, then rest, then resume. It's calm one moment, then suddenly there are explosions," the resident said.

"Pogroms and (ethnic) purification are taking place throughout the city," Carlos Rodriguez, the UNHCR's representative in Kigali, said in a report released in Geneva.

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