

Nuns, priests, aid workers massacred in Rwanda

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KIGALI, April 8 (Reuter) - Nuns, priests, aid workers and U.N. peacekeepers were among many victims of massacres in the Rwandan capital as ethnic bloodletting and renewed civil war gripped the central African country.

The Jesuit order said from Rome on Friday that 11 nuns and eight priests – all Africans – were killed at the order’s “Centre of Spirituality” in the capital 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.

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

MSF director Georges Dallémagne told Reuters in Brussels that

armed men, believed to be from Rwanda’s 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 vacuum following the killing of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi on Wednesday night and Rwanda’s woman prime minister on Thursday, a new day began with the scream of mortar bombs and crackle of rifle fire.

One resident spoke of “an orgy of killings out there”.

Fires raged in the city as rebels and soldiers battled around parliament and people from the minority Tutsi and majority Hutu tribes 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.

Military sources in Paris said France was considering using troops stationed in the Central African Republic to evacuate its nationals from Rwanda. There are about 600 French nationals in Rwanda, most in the capital.

Belgium, former colonial power in Rwanda, has put a unit of crack paratroops on alert for a possible evacuation of foreigners, government sources said.

The Belgian government said soldiers had killed 10 Belgian U.N. peacekeepers on Thursday. They had been in charge of the security of Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana who was also murdered on Thursday.

A U.N. spokesman in Kigali said Uwilingiyimana, a Hutu, was killed near the presidential palace in an area where U.N. forces had been denied access. He did not make it clear who killed her.

National staff of the United Nations Children’s Fund UNICEF were also attacked, but first reports indicated there were no serious injuries or

death, U.N. officials said from Geneva.

A spokesman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also said about 5,000 Rwandans and Burundis had fled their countries for Zaire since the violence began.

U.N. officials feared violence between Rwanda’s Hutu and Tutsi tribes would spread outside the capital.

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) appealed to Rwandans to end violence and urged countries that helped broker a peace accord between the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and the government last year to act to restore order.

The predominantly Tutsi rebels already in Kigali had been based in parliament since December after they entered the city peacefully to take part in the peace plan. Rebel reinforcements were reported to be moving on the capital, an aid worker said.

President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu who took power in 1973, and Cyprien Ntaryamira, president of neighbouring Burundi, died when a plane bringing them back from regional peace talks in Tanzania was hit by a rocket on Wednesday night.

Who killed them was not clear. The RPF denied involvement.

Members of the 700-strong presidential guard abducted opposition leaders and their families, including three government ministers, the president of the Constitutional Court

and president of the national assembly, U.N. officials said.

Residents said many killings were being carried out by members of the army who were searching house-to-house for Tutsi RPF sympathisers and their Hutu political allies.

Youths wielding machetes, knives and clubs stalked Kigali, settling tribal scores by hacking and clubbing people to death or simply shooting them, witnesses said.

The U.N. Security Council in New York denounced the violence.

The council took no fresh deci-

sion on whether to leave U.N. troops in place. It asked Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to gather information as soon as possible.

U.S. President Bill Clinton expressed horror that "elements of the Rwandan security forces" had murdered officials.

Battles between troops and the RPF shattered a peace accord made in the Tanzanian town of Arusha last August, aimed at ending a civil war that erupted in October 1990.

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