

U.N. council briefed on Rwanda, takes no decisions

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UNITED NATIONS, April 9 (Reuter) - Security Council members were briefed Saturday by senior U.N. secretariat officials and the French ambassador on developments in Rwanda, where French troops have arrived to evacuate foreign nationals from the strife-torn African nation.

Council President Colin Keating of New Zealand said later no decision was taken on the future of the 2,500-man U.N. force – the U.N. Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) – sent in last year to help implement an accord ending a three-year civil war between the government and rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF).

Keating said UNAMIR's capacity for fulfilling its mandate in the current circumstances were "at best slim" and the council would confer again Monday.

He said Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali meanwhile had the discretion to "take whatever actions are necessary" to ensure the protection of U.N. personnel.

In addition to the members of the U.N. force, they include some 200 to 250 civilian staff and dependents connected with various U.N. agencies.

Keating, who only Friday night announced various Rwandan factions had agreed on a ceasefire and the appointment of an interim government, said : "The security situation has deteriorated significantly."

The council, which was briefed by French Ambassador Jean-Bernard Merimee, made no comment on the arrival of French troops, expected to be joined shortly by soldiers flown in from Belgium, Rwanda's former colonial ruler.

Keating said a representative of the RPF had informed him the Patriotic Front, whose troops were reported marching on Kigali, the capital, had no objections to the evacuation of foreign nationals.

The RPF representative, Claude Dusaidi, later confirmed this, but said if outside forces remained "beyond what the humanitarian mission requires, it will be taken as a hostile act."

He said no time limit had been set for the evacuation, although earlier he had spoken to some reporters about a 10-12 hour deadline.

Nigerian envoy Ibrahim Gambari, speaking as coordinator of the council's non-aligned members, usually most sensitive to outside involvement in a country's domestic affairs, said the evacuation operation was "a special circumstance,

an extraordinary one.”

“And therefore one can understand the nature of the French and Belgian intervention, which is purely humanitarian and we hope will be limited in time frame.”

Gambari also said the United Nations should not be seen as being concerned only with the welfare of foreign nationals but of “innocent civilians who are getting killed in Rwanda.”

Merimee told reporters French troops arrived in Kigali “without fighting” and Rwandan forces removed obstacles they had placed on the runway. “It was a smooth operation.”

He said additional French troops were arriving but the total number would not exceed 400.

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