

120 Germans evacuated but others trapped in Kigali

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BONN, April 11 (Reuter) - A group of about 120 Germans, some 20 Swiss nationals and several Belgians arrived in Bonn early on Monday after fleeing the fighting in Rwanda.

They had travelled on Saturday in convoys to Bujumbura, capital of neighbouring Burundi, and were then flown to Bonn in a German army Airbus plane.

The German foreign ministry said two further convoys with about 100 Germans were heading out of Rwanda for Burundi. Bonn has estimated that about 300 Germans resided in the central African country.

Eleven staff members of Germany's Deutsche Welle radio and their families were still trapped by mines and gunfire in the radio station's office in the Rwandan capital Kigali.

"They cannot move. The street outside is mined and there is heavy fighting in the area," a foreign ministry spokesman said.

The Deutsche Welle workers were in contact with Germany by radio and telephone.

Germany's ambassador and his wife have remained in the city and would stay there until the radio workers could escape.

"The ambassador will stay as long as he can answer for his own safety," the spokesman told reporters.

The German government is trying to arrange for the use of a helicopter to get the Germans out.

The Deutsche Welle employees had tried to join convoys leaving for Burundi but were unable to get through roadblocks set up by soldiers.

Carrying few possessions and dressed in summer clothes, those who managed to fly out on the army plane came back to drizzling rain and cold in Germany.

Most said they had never felt threatened in Rwanda, where tribal fighting has claimed about 10,000 lives.

"As Europeans, we always felt we were somehow taboo," said Hildegard Barth, 51, who had worked at a French school in the central African country.

Wolfgang Peterhaensel, who worked in Rwanda on a German-run aid project, hid Rwandan Finance Minister Marc Rungera in his house for two days while soldiers outside hunted down and executed government ministers.

Rungera had knocked on his door a day after the rocket-attack killing of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi last Wednesday, which sparked the bloodshed.

“He said he was frightened for his life. We hid him for two days despite a terrible fear of raids by soldiers,” Peterhaensel said. “We don’t know what happened to him.”

German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel on Sunday expressed his gratitude to Burundian Foreign Minister Jean-Marie Ngendahayo for Burundi’s help in the evacuation efforts.

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