

Belgian evacuees from Rwanda arrive in Brussels

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BRUSSELS, April 11 (Reuter) - The first Belgians fleeing the fighting in Rwanda arrived in Brussels on Monday.

Most of the 89 Belgians came from around the southern Rwandan town Butare and had driven across the border into neighbouring Burundi to escape the possible spread of violence from the capital, Kigali.

"We decided to go because we heard what happened in Kigali," said Benedicte Van Cutsen, a Belgian teacher who fled with her Rwandan husband.

"There were rumours in Butare that there were some presidential guards there, that they had left Kigali in civilian clothes... We were afraid," she said, adding that Butare was quiet.

After landing at Brussels airport on a plane belonging to the Belgian national airline, Sabena, the Belgians were taken to a nearby military hospital where they were reunited with relatives and welcomed by Red Cross workers.

Twenty-six Dutch nationals were also on the plane.

Some of the evacuees said they had joined up with convoys of Germans travelling to Bujumbura, the Burundi capital.

"In Rwanda we had no escorts but all went well. From Burundi we had escorts from province to province until we reached Bujumbura," Van Cutsen said.

None of the evacuees reported seeing any violence in Butare, but one said he had heard what sounded like mortar fire in the distance. Many said they were afraid for Belgian and Rwandan friends left behind.

"We were very lucky to have had the chance to leave in calmness," said Stephane Verhaegen, another Belgian.

Belgian paratroopers were flown into Kigali on Sunday as part of an international effort to evacuate Belgians and other foreigners after an orgy of violence in the capital, where thousands are feared to have died following the assassination of the president.

Fifteen hundred Belgian citizens were reported to have been living in Rwanda, a former Belgian colony, when the violence erupted.

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