

U.S. Adventists flee Rwanda college campus carnage

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NEW YORK, April 11 (Reuter) - About 70 foreigners, including Americans and Europeans, working at a U.S. church college in Rwanda escaped to safety in Zaire Monday after surviving a campus carnage in which over 200 people were killed, the Seventh Day Adventist Church said Monday.

Escorted by French and Belgian paratroopers, about 22 Americans and about 50 other foreigners arrived safely in Goma, Zaire, after surviving a tribal blood-bath on the grounds of the church-run Central African University, it said.

Sheltered at two campus homes between Friday and Sunday, the foreigners, including some from Canada, Belgium, Denmark, Bulgaria and Madagascar, were unharmed as opposing Rwandan tribespeople fought on the university grounds outside Mudende, northwest of the capital Kigali.

"The information we have is there were more than 200 bodies on campus, there were no Americans or foreigners among them," said Gerry Karst, an Adventist official at the church's worldwide headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Rwanda, a central African nation, was rocked by violence since President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed by a rocket attack on his plane in Kigali Wednesday night.

His death launched the age-old strife between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority into a new orgy of slaughter in which the prime minister and several Cabinet ministers, all Tutsis, were murdered, as were nuns, priests, aid workers and 10 Belgian soldiers serving with the United Nations.

Red Cross officials believe that 20,000 people could have died in the violence.

At the onset of the eruption of violence, Tutsi villagers sought refuge on the campus, which has about 300 students and was founded in 1979, Karst said.

A mob of Hutus swarmed onto the grounds later and the killings began and probably took place within a 24-hour period, Karst told Reuters. "On Sunday, the killings stopped," he said.

It was unclear when the French and Belgian paratroopers arrived. But by Sunday, the foreigners had been evacuated from the campus to the town of Gisenye, near the Zaire border.

The Adventists have 300,000 church members in Rwanda, a country of about eight million people, Karst said.

Africans account for about two million of the worldwide community of more than seven million Adventists. The church has been active in Rwanda, a former Belgian colony, since the early 20th century, said Karst, assistant to the president of the general conference of the Seventh Day Adventists.

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