

U.S. journalists blocked in Kigali hotel evacuated

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BRUSSELS, April 14 (Reuter) - Eleven U.S. journalists were evacuated to Kigali airport after being blocked in a hotel in the Rwandan capital, a Belgian armed forces spokesman said on Thursday.

"They were saved by Belgian paratroops. I don't know if they are still at Kigali airport or are on their way to Nairobi already," the spokesman said.

The journalists refused to leave the Hotel Mille Collines when urged to do so on Wednesday by Belgian paratroops on a rescue mission in central Kigali.

Earlier on Thursday Belgian army spokesman Colonel Gilbert Hertoghe said the journalists wanted to leave, but the troops could not get there because of fighting around the hotel and also on the road from the airport to the city.

He said the army believed a Belgian family of six had also reached the hotel, but this could not be confirmed.

Hertoghe said the people in the hotel were the last foreigners in Kigali. A dozen others, including some Belgians, still had to be traced and evacuated from southern Rwanda, but the last foreigners in the northern region, three nuns, were picked up by helicopter earlier on Thursday.

Belgium, the only western country with rescue forces still in the central African state, wants to comply with a rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front ultimatum which said troops sent to evacuate foreigners must be out by midnight (2200 GMT).

United Nations peacekeeping forces, including more than 400 Belgian soldiers, are also in the country.

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