

End U.N. peacekeeping role in Rwanda, Belgium says

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BRUSSELS, April 15 (Reuter) - Belgium said on Friday the United Nations should suspend its peacekeeping operation in Rwanda and stepped up the withdrawal of troops sent in last weekend to evacuate foreigners.

An army spokesman said the last of the 400 troops were expected to be flown out Friday evening. About 12 flights had left Friday for Nairobi.

Belgian U.N. forces were at the airport in the capital Kigali and were awaiting orders to leave, he said.

The troops had fired a warning salvo to stop Rwandan army soldiers attacking the Rwandan Patriotic Front from the airport. "We shot 50 metres beyond their battery range as a warning after asking them to stop twice and the battery was moved," the spokesman said.

A government statement said the U.N. mission in Rwanda, which has been mired in violence since the assassination of the president last week, had lost its point because of the "brutal rupture" in the peace and democracy process.

"That is why the government is in favour of the suspension of the U.N. mandate and the withdrawal of troops," it added.

Ten Belgian soldiers serving with the U.N. were killed in the violence that followed the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana in a rocket attack on his plane.

Belgian Foreign Minister Willy Claes said on Thursday that Belgium, the former colonial power in Rwanda, would withdraw its U.N. contingent of about 420 men.

Claes said the presence of the U.N. troops had not prevented the deaths of tens of thousands of people and there was such an anti-Belgian climate in Rwanda that Belgium could no longer take the responsibility of endangering its soldiers further.

The government statement said that more than 1,500 people had been repatriated to Belgium and the evacuation was in its final phase.

Luxembourg's Foreign Ministry said its honorary consul, Charles Shamakiga, had been killed on April 7 in the violence following the president's death.

The international medical agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said a six-person surgical team which travelled to Rwanda via Burundi was operating from an annex to Kigali's Centre Hospitalier.

But another team flown in via Nairobi could not reach the centre of Kigali due to the fighting and had to return to Nairobi.

MSF also said it had teams in some other regions. Tension was high in the southern Butare and Bugesera provinces between the local population and refugees from Burundi who had left certain camps to return to Burundi, the statement said.

It said that refugees were being attacked on the road by armed groups. "Corpses of 11 women, their hands tied behind their backs and mutilated by machetes, arrived at Butare hospital on Thursday afternoon," it said.

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