

U.N. council says Rwanda ceasefire is priority

Goodman, Anthony

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UNITED NATIONS, April 15 (Reuter) - The Security Council said late Friday the immediate priority in civil war-torn Rwanda was the establishment of a ceasefire between government forces and the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF).

“Council members demand that the parties agree to an immediate ceasefire and return to the negotiating table,” said a statement read to reporters by council President Colin Keating of New Zealand.

“In the members’ view, the immediate priority in Rwanda is the establishment of a ceasefire between the government forces and the RPF.”

No immediate decision was announced on the future of the 2,500-man U.N. Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), set up last year to help implement an agreement signed in Arusha, Tanzania, aimed at ending a three-year civil war.

Fighting erupted with new intensity last week after Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of neighbouring Burundi were killed when their plane was shot down April 6 as it was landing at Kigali, the capital, after a flight from Tanzania.

The council said it intended to keep under constant review the force levels and activities of UNAMIR and “to take decisions in this regard at the appropriate time.”

This reflected its inability to decide what future role, if any, the U.N. force might play until the chaotic situation became clearer in Rwanda, where the RPF and government forces are still battling for Kigali.

The statement said members “fully understood Belgium’s decision” to withdraw its 420-man contingent from UNAMIR at the same time that it repatriated troops sent in last week to provide security for the evacuation of foreign nationals.

Ten Belgian U.N. peacekeepers were among the thousands of people butchered in an orgy of bloodletting, mostly between members of the minority Tutsi tribe and the Hutu, who controlled the Habyarimana government.

The council statement also noted the “willingness of other major troop contributing countries to maintain their troops with UNAMIR” as long as there was a useful role for them.

The largest remaining U.N. contingents are from Bangladesh, with about 940 soldiers, and from Ghana, with some 840. About 20 other countries provide much smaller numbers.

The council urged the U.N. special representative in Rwanda, Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh of Cameroon, to make every effort to facilitate a ceasefire and reaffirmed that the Arusha peace agreement remained the only viable framework for resolving the conflict.

Underlining the gravity of the situation, the council said it was determined not to allow the security of UNAMIR personnel to be placed at serious risk.

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