

# Agency sends first aid flight to Rwandan refugees

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LONDON, April 19 (Reuter) - British aid agency Oxfam said its first relief flight bringing aid to refugees fleeing bloodshed in Rwanda would leave London on Wednesday and appealed for more U.N. soldiers to protect civilians.

Tens of thousands of Rwandans are believed to have died and up to two million have fled amid two weeks' fighting between the Hutu-dominated army and the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF).

The U.N. Security Council was expected to order the withdrawal of peace-keeping troops from the country on Tuesday following the failure last week of U.N.-brokered face-to-face talks between the government and RPF representatives in Kigali.

Oxfam said a plane-load of vehicles, communications equipment, blankets and two emergency staff would leave for Goma in nearby Zaire at a cost of 478,000 pounds (\$706,000). A second flight is due to leave London's Gatwick airport on Saturday.

"Thousands (of refugees) are moving south from the capital Kigali. It is unclear at the moment where people will end up," Oxfam said in a statement, adding that Rwandan border guards were preventing refugees from crossing the frontiers.

"The Tanzanian border in particular is difficult to cross except by guarded bridges, as it is marked by the fast-flowing crocodile-infested Kagera river," it added.

It said United Nations forces in Rwanda were not strong enough to protect civilians and had no clear mandate to do so.

"Oxfam and other voluntary organisations across Europe are appealing to the U.N. Security Council...to increase the size of the U.N. force and to bring political pressure to bear for a ceasefire and for protection of civilians."

It said it had asked the Organisation of African Unity and neighbouring Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda to call an emergency summit meeting to discuss the situation in the tiny central African state.

Last week Oxfam launched an emergency appeal to the British public to raise more than one million pounds (\$1.5 million) to get urgent aid to the former Belgian colony. On Tuesday the British government pledged to give 820,000 pounds (\$1.2 million) in humanitarian aid for victims of the conflict.

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