

Rwanda refugees shelled, some U.N. forces pull out

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KIGALI, April 19 (Reuter) - Shells exploded on Tuesday in and around Kigali's national stadium packed with terrified displaced people, killing nine and wounding more than 170.

The U.N. evacuated some forces without a ceasefire in sight in the tribal slaughter that has killed tens of thousands.

United Nations officials said positions were hardening on both sides of the conflict and after nearly two weeks of bloodshed the Security Council was likely to decide to withdraw all U.N. peacekeepers.

The army and rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) are battling for control of the capital, where the downing of the Rwandan president's plane on April 6 set off a bloodbath pitting majority Hutus against the minority Tutsis.

In addition to the dead, up to two million Rwandans have been driven from their homes.

"The situation appears to be getting worse rather than improving," Abdul Kabia, executive director of UNAMIR, the U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda, said as shelling shook the city.

"We are continuing to talk to both parties but our efforts have stalled and we're not getting anywhere," he told Reuters.

"We find that the positions of both parties are hardening. They are making more demands...not helpful to the peace process.

"We understand the (U.N.) Security Council will meet later today to take definite decisions on the future of UNAMIR. If they ask us to stay we will stay. If they ask us to go we will go."

Another official, who declined to be identified, said : "It appears likely that they will tell us to leave."

In the morning, about 30 shells slammed into and around Amahoro Stadium where 4,000 people displaced by the killing have been trapped without food near the capital's worst battle zones for more than a week.

UNAMIR said nine people were killed in the stadium, more than 40 were taken to the King Faisal Hospital and peacekeepers were unable to reach nearby areas where more dead were reported.

Rescue workers from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also reached the stadium and evacuated 33 seriously wounded but estimated

100 more casualties from the shelling remained in the area, officials said.

The ICRC team left 25 tonnes of food and medical supplies at the stadium for the trapped people to treat their wounded.

At Kigali airport, held jointly by U.N. forces and Rwandan troops, a company of Bangladeshi engineers left aboard transport planes and some U.N. military observers prepared to fly out.

"We are unhappy because we came to establish peace in this country and we have failed," a Bangladeshi sergeant said.

UNAMIR commander Brigadier-General Romeo Dallaire denied flight was a prelude to a total withdrawal.

"What is going on is that I am thinning out some forces which I don't need on the ground," he told Reuters.

UNAMIR said it protested strongly about the stadium killings to the Rwandan army chief, who appeared to have contacted the army battery responsible for the barrage because it stopped.

But shelling at a slower pace continued across the city as well as fierce clashes between rebels and government forces.

U.N.-brokered talks between the government and RPF representatives in Kigali on Friday failed when both sides presented stiff conditions for starting peace negotiations.

Belgium's contingent to the 2,500-strong U.N. force, sent to Rwanda last year to help implement a peace pact, was due to withdraw fully from Tuesday, possibly by road to Tanzania.

In Brussels, a spokesman for the armed forces, said about 300 Belgian U.N. peacekeepers were still holed up at Kigali airport on Tuesday. He said about 120 had already left Rwanda.

Ghanaian troops are replacing Belgian forces at the airport and the spokesman expected all the Ghanaians to be in place by midnight so the evacuation of the last troops could begin.

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