

British aid agency blasts U.N. cuts in Rwanda

Reuters, April 22, 1994

NAIROBI, April 22 (Reuter) - The aid agency Oxfam condemned on Friday the U.N. Security Council's decision to slash the size of U.N. forces in Rwanda to less than 300, saying thousands of civilians would lose what little safety they had.

In a statement sent to Reuters in Nairobi, Oxfam United Kingdom and Ireland Director David Bryer said :

"We are outraged at this short-sighted callous decision. U.N. troops on the ground in Kigali are doing their best, in terrible circumstances to protect lives. They want to do more, not less.

"If the Security Council makes them pull out, then many thousands of civilians will almost certainly lose what little security they have."

The Security Council voted on Thursday to cut the number of U.N. peacekeepers in Rwanda to a bare minimum of 270 despite fears a withdrawal would increase killings and chaos in the country.

Some 1,500 members of the 2,500-strong U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda were still in the country on Thursday.

Bryer said the Security Council seemed more concerned with its own public relations than protecting people and sought to reduce damage to the United Nations' image by pulling out forces rather than hearing how they had to stand by while people were killed.

He said a better solution would be to extend the mandate of the U.N. force and increase its strength to allow it to protect civilians.

Oxfam said the United Nations should postpone the withdrawal of its forces at least until after peace talks opening on Saturday between the Rwandan government and rebels in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha.

"It is obviously not feasible for an international force to extend protection countrywide but...the U.N. Security Council should rethink and maintain the existing number of troops in Kigali," Bryer said.

(c) Reuters Limited 1994