

Hopes low for Rwanda ceasefire

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NAIROBI, April 26 (Reuter) - A ceasefire declared by Rwandan rebel forces was due to start on Tuesday morning, but few aid and U.N. officials hold out much hope it will end nearly three weeks of horrifying slaughter.

Hours before the unilateral ceasefire announced by the Rwanda Patriotic Force (RPF) was supposed to come into force at midnight (2200 GMT) on Monday, heavy shelling thundered across Rwanda's blood-soaked capital Kigali.

"I don't know what will happen after midnight," said Abdul Kabia, executive director of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). "But I am hopeful maybe we will have a peaceful night."

U.N. officials note that government forces in Kigali are largely out of control of the rump government in the town of Gityrama to the southwest.

A government team signed a ceasefire agreement from Sunday brokered by Zaire. But the RPF did not, and the fighting continued.

Most killings, which aid workers say have mounted to 100,000, are the mass slaughter of unarmed civilian men, women and children rather than battlefield losses in the war between the RPF and the military.

U.N. officials say the massacres, sparked by the death of president Juvenal Habyarimana in a rocket attack on his plane on April 6, are the work of sections of the government forces, particularly the presidential guard, and militias of the majority Hutu tribe set up by Habyarimana's ruling party.

The Tutsi-dominated RPF, which says it launched an offensive on Kigali on April 8 to stop the killings and restore the rule of law, accuses the international community of "keeping silent in the face of evil".

"Today everybody is talking of a ceasefire. The question of genocide has been relegated to a secondary issue," complained RPF Secretary-General Theogene Rudasingwa on Monday in Tanzania's northern town of Arusha where weekend peace talks failed to get off the ground.

Rudasingwa accused the United Nations of deliberately ignoring the genocide in Rwanda in contrast to the world body's more forceful policy in Bosnia.

UNAMIR spokesman Moctar Gueye denies the United Nations has kept silent and said it would also seek justice for the torture and murder of 10 Belgian peacekeepers by presidential guards on April 7.

In recent days government artillery batteries have fired on U.N. personnel, who have been reduced to 270 from 2,500 in Rwanda by a Security Council resolution on Thursday, he said.

Even before the presidential plane was shot down, human rights groups had for months warned of violence in Rwanda, saying Habyarimana imported weapons from South Africa, France and Egypt.

The RPF warned that for the ceasefire to continue to be observed government forces would have to stop massacres in areas they control within 96 hours.

The United Nations says that adding to the horrors, a health disaster is imminent.

In Kigali "there is literally nothing by way of medication, no water, no sanitation facilities, no materials to build latrines," said Peter Hansen, U.N. undersecretary for humanitarian affairs.

Hansen, who had just returned from the Rwandan capital, appealed for an emergency \$11.68 million as a preliminary step.

He told reporters in Nairobi : "In Kigali, there are decomposing bodies being eaten by dogs, rats, birds..."

Fears violence would spread to neighbouring Burundi, where simmering Hutu-Tutsi rivalry has so far been held in check, grew on Monday when a paratroopers attempted a coup. It was foiled.

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