

U.N. makes urgent appeal to stop Rwanda disaster

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NAIROBI, April 25 (Reuter) - The United Nations appealed for an emergency \$11.68 million on Monday for Rwanda where it said a health disaster was imminent with dogs, rats and birds eating rotting corpses.

Peter Hansen, U.N. undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, urged the international community to respond swiftly and provide the money for humanitarian needs in Rwanda, site of a horrific tribal bloodletting.

"This is a preliminary flash appeal. No one can estimate what the needs are but they are immense," he told reporters in Nairobi after leading a U.N. team to the capital Kigali at the weekend.

"A public health disaster waiting to happen in Kigali," said Hansen. "There is literally nothing by way of medication, no water, no sanitation facilities, no materials to build latrines.

"In Kigali, there are decomposing bodies being eaten by dogs, rats, birds - a prescription for a public health disaster."

Hansen said medical experts feared "a bad old-fashioned plague" of diseases, especially cholera.

He said an estimated 11,000 Rwandans were sheltering at the national Amahoro stadium in Kigali and thousands of others across the capital were living in "a truly horrible situation".

"They are strewn across concrete floors, bringing whatever little belongings they have. You have babies looking after other smaller babies. You have an appalling mass of human beings living under appalling circumstances," he told a news conference.

He said some 40,000 Rwandans were scattered along a battle zone across Kigali and the immediate U.N. priority was to find a way to remove them from amid the violence to a place of safety.

Four U.N. humanitarian experts remained in Rwanda to assess needs and would be escorted by U.N. peacekeepers, Hansen said.

He said there were not enough U.N. peacekeepers in Kigali to make the capital secure but their mandate changed after fighting erupted on April 6 to supporting a U.N. humanitarian mission.

The U.N. Security Council last week cut the strength of U.N. forces in Rwanda from 2,500 to 270.

Hansen said almost 1.3 million Rwandans were either displaced within Rwanda or had fled to neighbouring Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire. Up to 300,000 Rwandans were camped in the south where more violence was reported.

They fled during renewed civil war and massacres after President Juvenal Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira died in a rocket attack on their plane.

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