

France criticises Rwanda rebels for shunning talks

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PARIS, May 5 (Reuter) - France condemned Rwandan rebels on Thursday for refusing to hold face-to-face peace talks with the central African country's interim government or considering a halt in fighting.

A bid by Tanzania this week to convene peace talks between Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and government delegations fell foul of the rebels' insistence that they would never meet face-to-face with what they term the "clique of killers".

"France deplors the fact that the RPF has refused to engage in talks and to consider any halt in fighting," Foreign Ministry spokesman Richard Duque told a regular news briefing.

An initial attempt to convene peace talks two weeks ago in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha collapsed before even starting when a Rwandan government team failed to arrive and the RPF representative ruled out meeting it anyway.

On Tuesday the Rwandan rebels ruled out an early ceasefire and said a foreign force could not halt four weeks of civil war and tribal bloodletting.

The Foreign Ministry's statement intensified a simmering war of words with the rebels, who have been critical of France and accused it of taking sides in the conflict.

Earlier this week Jacques Bihozagara, head of international affairs for the RPF, called France's role "shameful" in allowing the family of former president Juvenal Habyarimana, slain in an attack on his airplane on April 6, to seek refuge in France.

"The case of France is a shameful example of these moves and constitutes one of the most inexcusable mistakes towards the Rwandan people," Bihozagara said.

Asked to comment on the possibility of sending troops from other African countries into Rwanda, Duque said such a force could only be use-

ful if a ceasefire were in place.

Paris has released a 10 million franc (\$1.8 million) emergency credit

for Rwanda, he said.

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