

Ethnic warfare rages in Kigali as ceasefire announced

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KIGALI, April 10 (AFP) - Ethnic warfare raged in the Rwandan capital Kigali Sunday as people were murdered in the streets and in their homes, and western countries started pulling out their nationals.

Fears of an advance on the capital by 4,000 ethnic Tutsis of the Rwandan Patriotic Front were initially eased by a ceasefire agreement between the army and the rebels, a Belgian UN commander announced Sunday.

"The two sides agreed this morning on a ceasefire and apart from sporadic shots it seems to be holding," Colonel Luc Marchal said in Kigali in a live interview with Belgian television.

But the International Committee of the Red Cross said later that some Rwandan army forces and rebels clashed on the outskirts of Kigali using mortars, grenades and automatic weapons.

At least 1,000 people have died in ethnic slaughter sparked off by the deaths Wednesday of Rwanda's Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana and his Burundi counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira in an air crash. The Rwandan foreign ministry said the plane had been shot down.

Despite the ceasefire between the rebels and the army, roving gangs continued the bloodletting in Kigali. Most of the victims were minority Tutsis killed by majority Hutus. Bodies piled up some streets.

The report of the ceasefire came as the coordinated multi-nation emergency operation to pull thousands of foreigners out of Rwanda stepped up a gear, with France and Belgium coordinating airlifts from a centre in Nairobi.

The first group of French nationals was due to arrive in Paris Sunday night, the French foreign ministry said, and airlifts of further French

groups from Kigali to the Burundi capital Bujumbura continued during the day.

Meanwhile eight Belgian planes left Nairobi Sunday for Rwanda to start evacuating between 1,500 and 2,000 Belgians and other expatriates after Belgium was granted authorisation from Rwandan authorities to land at Kigali airport, the Belgian embassy in Kenya said.

Two US planes carrying 150 foreign nationals who fled Rwanda by road, including Americans, Canadians, Belgians and Britons, arrived in Nairobi from Burundi Sunday, a spokesman from the US embassy in Kenya said. The aircraft are to return Monday to Bujumbura to collect more foreigners.

Five convoys of cars full of foreign nationals had left Kigali for Burundi on Sunday, the spokesman said. The first convoy comprised 150 cars and included that of the American ambassador in Rwanda.

Vans picked up piles of dead bodies in Kigali streets to take them for burial in mass graves. Many people were murdered in their homes and most Kigali residents do not dare to go out except for essential food supplies.

Red Cross workers reported light arms fire Sunday morning but said they could no longer hear any heavy weapons fire.

A spokesman for the Interna-

tional Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) headquarters in the capital said: "There are too many bodies in the streets, so the ICRC is giving priority to the wounded, to those still alive."

In New York the Rwandan Patriotic Front's envoy Claude Dusaidi said rebel forces would attack any foreign troops who stayed behind after evacuating their nationals. He said the evacuations should take no longer than 12 hours.

French Defence Minister Francois Leotard, speaking from Oman, stressed his troops – some 500 soldiers by Sunday – had not been deployed "to wage war" but to carry out a "pinpoint" evacuation operation.

The director of Rwanda's French school Alain Pierron said 200 of France's 600 nationals had been evacuated since airlifts began Saturday. The operation was taking place under good conditions, he said.

UN agencies planned to evacuate more civilian personnel from Kigali after some 100 staff left Saturday for Burundi by road, and the Indian government asked its own nationals in Rwanda Sunday to be ready for "immediate evacuation."

In London, the British Foreign Office said it had advised British nationals in a BBC World Service broadcast to leave Rwanda via Kigali airport.