

A first planeload of French nationals left the Rwandan...

AFP, April 9, 1994

PARIS, April 9 (AFP) - A first planeload of French nationals left the Rwandan capital Kigali Saturday evening, officials said as rebels advanced on the city where violent ethnic clashes have killed at least 1,000 people.

Earlier, the Foreign Ministry said the evacuation of an estimated 600 French citizens was underway.

"In response to continuing serious troubles in Rwanda, the French authorities have made aircraft available to allow our citizens to leave Kigali in stages," spokeswoman Catherine Colonna said.

The ministry "strongly advises French citizens to leave the country," she said, adding that some living outside the capital had already set off for neighbouring Zaire or Burundi.

Almost 300 French troops arrived early Saturday at Kigali airport to

help prepare for the rescue mission.

At the United Nations in New York Saturday, a spokesman for the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) said its forces would attack any foreign troops remaining in the country after the evacuation of foreigners.

Foreign troops will be "allowed for as long as to take their people," Claude Dusaidi said. "If they stay longer for any other mission that is not humanitarian, we shall take them as hostile forces and engage them in combat."

The bloodshed in Rwanda was triggered on Wednesday when presidents Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi were killed with 10 others. Their aircraft crashed in Kigali, reportedly after being shot down.

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