

French troops begin withdrawal from Rwanda, Italians move in

AFP, April 12, 1994

PARIS, April 12 (AFP) - France began to pull its troops out of Rwanda Tuesday as the last of its nationals were evacuated, the French defence ministry said.

"France means to show that its intervention in Rwanda is strictly limited to evacuating nationals whose life is in danger," a ministry statement issued Tuesday said, announcing the withdrawal of 150 troops, one third of its forces in the strife-torn east African country.

The rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) earlier warned France not to let its troops get involved in the fighting in Rwanda, where thousands have reportedly died in ethnic bloodletting since President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in an air crash Wednesday.

Meanwhile Italy deployed 80 paratroopers in Rwanda to help secure Kigali airport Tuesday, and said it planned to send 80 more troops to

Nairobi as the evacuation of foreign nationals out of Rwanda continued.

A joint statement from Italy's defence and foreign ministries Tuesday said Italian troops at Kigali were working with French and Belgian troops to secure the airport, and had helped evacuate a group of 40 Italians from Rwanda.

France's withdrawal of 150 troops came as the last of its nationals left Rwanda, the defence ministry statement said. Out of 1,300 people evacuated Tuesday by French aeroplanes, 454 were French and the rest were other Europeans, Americans, Africans and Asian nationals.

Remaining French troops would continue to help the evacuation effort, the defence ministry said. "In close cooperation with Belgian forces, French soldiers are still taking part in the evacuation of foreign nationals at their request," the statement said.

The extra 80 Italian troops ex-

pected to arrive in Nairobi Tuesday evening would be on standby for rapid deployment in Kigali, the Italian defence and foreign ministries said.

Meanwhile, 11 Italians aid workers, five Belgians and 40 Rwandan orphans, blocked by rebel fighters in the Riilima region, were due to arrive at Kigali airport shortly, Italian authorities added.

Belgian forces freed the group overnight from Monday to Tuesday

after a request from the Italian government. The Rwandan orphans will be flown to Italy, the statement said.

Rebels from the RPF reached Kigali Tuesday to join 600 fellow fighters already in the Rwandan capital, the United Nations reported earlier. Amid fears of fresh carnage, an RPF spokeswoman said rebel fighters were not in a hurry to take Kigali and would move slowly to avoid massive destruction of the city.

bur/jub/jms