

# Rwandan rebels advance towards capital

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KIGALI, April 10 (Reuter) – Rwandan rebels advanced towards the central African state's capital, Kigali, on Sunday as Western forces scrambled to rescue foreigners caught up in renewed civil war and tribal score-settling.

While aid workers, missionaries and diplomats tried to flee an orgy of ethnic bloodshed, rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) said a 4,000-strong force was moving on the rambling, hilly city on two fronts.

"They (troops) may arrive as early as before dawn on Sunday. But they met strong resistance along the way, so this is not certain," said an RPF official who asked not to be named.

He said the rebel force would reinforce a 600-strong battalion already in Kigali and would engage government troops who have gone on a rampage in the city.

Fighting erupted in the former Belgian colony after President Juvenal Habyarimana and the president of the neighbouring state of Burundi were killed on Wednesday in a rocket attack on their plane.

The Red Cross reported tens of thousands killed in violence pitting gangs of Hutu tribesmen, backed by renegade army units, against Tutsi rivals accused of killing Habyarimana, a Hutu.

"Yesterday, we were talking about

thousands of dead. Today we can start with tens of thousands," Herve Le Guillouzie, medical coordinator of the International Committee of the Red Cross, told Reuters.

He said corpses were everywhere – "in the houses, in the streets, everywhere."

The RPF official said : "We must destroy the capacity of this regime to kill and destroy. They (government soldiers) have three options : join us, stand aside or fight us."

In Washington, President Bill Clinton said he was deeply concerned with the fate of Americans – most of them teachers or missionaries – caught in the escalating violence.

Witnesses said three convoys of foreigners succeeded in leaving Kigali by road on Saturday and reached the relative calm of Burundi.

A Burundian journalist told Reuters in Nairobi by telephone that dozens of U.S. marines had arrived in Burundi to oversee evacuation of American civilians from Rwanda.

"Americans and Europeans have arrived here by road from the chaos of Rwanda," journalist Deogratius Muvira said. "They were 172 people, travelling in 72 cars from Butare in southern Rwanda."

In Paris, the foreign ministry said French troops evacuated 43 nationals

from Kigali by air and more rescue flights were planned. "The operation is proceeding very well," a ministry spokeswoman said.

Reuters Television cameraman Mohamed Shaffi said he filmed one American and one Red Cross convoy snaking their way through Kigali towards the main road to Burundi.

"It is extremely tense. Roadblocks are manned by large groups of youths wielding knives and handgrenades and warning they will attack and kill French and Belgians," Shaffi said.

About 400 French troops flew into the city early on Saturday in three military transports, but apparently failed to secure the airport before venturing into the eerily-quiet city where fighting had subsided.

Belgian paratroops, carrying tonnes of military equipment, were supposed to land in Kigali later but officials in Brussels said they would be diverted to neighbouring countries.

Residents of Kigali, many barricaded in their homes, said the city was lawless with no one group in control.

Lindsey Hilsum, a reporter with

the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), said she had witnessed "terrible things."

"It's been absolutely horrific. In some ways, nearly the worst thing I saw was a woman who came into hospital carrying her baby and the baby's legs had been severed," she said.

"Just going into the casualty ward you have to step over people with the most terrible wounds and the floor is just encrusted with blood."

Colonel Luc Marchal, commander of Belgian forces serving with a 2,500-strong U.N. mission in the country, said government forces blocked the runway at Kigali airport with fire trucks after the French troops landed.

Paul Kagame, leader of the predominantly Tutsi rebel RPF, rejected a new interim government and said his troops would attack and take the city.

But new interim President Venat Theodore Sindikubwabo said that only those who did not understand the constitution would dispute or oppose his ascension to power.

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