[UN-brokered ceasefire talks fail to resume as fierce fighting and massacres continue in Kigali]

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KIGALI, April 17 (AFP) - Fierce fighting raged in Rwanda's blood-sodden capital Kigali as the United Nations failed to persuade rebels and government forces to attend a new round of truce talks Sunday.

Machine guns rattled and mortars thudded as the two sides pounded each other's positions and the fighting spread to the city centre, a UN spokesman said.

Rebel and army commanders met Friday for the first time since the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana in a plane crash 11 days ago plunged the small central African nation into an orgy of ethnic slaughter.

Most of the 20,000 people killed were members of the minority Tutsi tribe which dominates the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front, hacked or clubbed to death by hardline government supporters from the majority Hutu group.

The two sides set conditions for a truce Saturday, and a fresh round of talks was planned Sunday but had not taken place by the end of the day.

Abdul Kabia of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda told AFP that the world body was continuing discussions with both sides in an effort to organise further talks.

An interim government proclaimed after Habyarimana's death on Saturday named a new armed forces chief, Colonel Augustin Bizimungu, to replace General Deogratias Nasabimana, killed with the president. The army said Habyarimana's plane was shot down.

The government has fled Kigali, where rebels are digging in for a trench and artillery war, and is based at Gitarama, south of the capital.

Kabia said the armed forces had

accepted a rebel demand for joint patrols by security forces and its guerrillas to restore order. They also agreed to the principle of a judicial inquiry into the bloodshed in Kigali.

But it was unclear how they had responded to the rebels' insistence that the government be disbanded.

The rebels also want the presidential guard, accused of horrific atrocities, to be disbanded.

Belgian Foreign Minister Willy Claes said in Brussels on Saturday that 400 Belgian soldiers were "trapped like rats" at Kigali airport, along with about 100 foreign and Rwandan refugees.

"We have information from very good sources that armed Rwandan (rebel) forces are preparing to attack the airport, while the chaos in Kigali is growing by the hour and anti-Belgian sentiment is still very intense," Claes said.

Belgium decided to withdraw its 400 peacekeepers from the 2,500-strong UN force after the presidential guard killed 10 Belgian soldiers protecting Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyamana.

They assassinated her because she supported August peace accords that were to have led to the formation of a broad-based government including the rebel Patriotic Front.

Belgian troops are seen as pro-rebel, and French forces who have now left as pro-government.

UN convoys ferrying displaced people to camps around Kigali are being "harassed" by armed militiamen and bandits manning checkpoints, Kabia said.

The militiamen are members of Habyarimana's former ruling party, the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic (CDR), who oppose the August peace accords.

Hutu extremists have set up roadblocks all around the city, Kabia said.

Colonel Moeen Ahmed of Bangladesh, the UN military operations chief, said Friday that the rebels were not far from taking Kigali.

Meanwhile columns of civilians carrying bundles continued their desperate exodus on foot from Kigali, witnesses said. Some, either Tutsis or people accused of supporting the rebels, were killed by militiamen at the many checkpoints set up around Kigali, the witnesses said.

Rwanda's bloodbath has sent thousands of people fleeing into neighbouring countries, sparking a regional refugee crisis as aid agencies struggle to set up camps to feed and care for them.

The United Nations meanwhile flew 800 kilograms of medicine and food to Kigali for its peacekeepers.

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