

Westerners flee Rwanda as rebels march on the capital

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AFP, April 9, 1994

BRUSSELS, April 10 (AFP) - Belgium, France, the United States and other western nations rushed Saturday to evacuate up to 4,000 foreigners from Rwanda where all-out civil war loomed as rebel forces marched on the capital.

At least 1,000 people have been killed and thousands wounded in ethnic bloodshed between Hutus and the members of the Tutsi minority, sparked by the deaths Wednesday in a plane crash of Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira, both Hutus.

Three plane loads of Belgian paratroopers left Brussels by air to assist in the evacuation of about 2,000 Belgians and other foreigners from Kigali.

Belgian television said there were about 285 troops on board the Nairobi-bound flight. Earlier Saturday, two aircraft carrying about 400

paratroopers left Melsbroek military air base.

However a Belgian Defence Department spokesman said the Belgian troops could not land at Kigali airport because Rwandan government forces spurred by anti-Belgian propaganda were blocking the runway there to all but French aircraft.

He said some members of the Rwandan presidential guard had ordered vehicles onto the runway Friday so aircraft could not land. He said they were responsible for spreading anti-Belgian propaganda, including accusations that Belgian UN troops had shot down the presidential aircraft.

Ten Belgian UN soldiers were killed Thursday after vainly trying to prevent the murder of Tutsi Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingyimana by members of the presidential guard.

The spokesman Freddy van Deweghe said Rwandan Hutu author-

ities supported the French presence because France, unlike Belgium, did not withdraw its troops during a major Tutsi rebel offensive in 1990.

Nearly 300 French troops were deployed at Kigali airport early Saturday in preparation for evacuation of foreigners. The airport is about 10 kilometres (six miles) outside Kigali and earlier Saturday, eight aircraft left Brussels laden with heavy equipment which could be used to secure the route to the airport.

French government officials said evacuation flights for 600 French nationals and other foreigners in Rwanda had already begun.

French deputy foreign ministry spokeswoman Catherine Colonna said a first flight carrying 43 French nationals had left for Bangui in the Central African Republic.

US authorities said about 330 US marines had been flown from Mombasa in Kenya to Bujumbura in Burundi which adjoins Rwanda.

They were backed by helicopters and transport planes to help evacuate 255 Americans from Kigali, mainly missionaries and aid workers.

A road convoy of about 200 Americans left Kigali Saturday for Burundi. Around 200 Europeans, also left in private cars from the southern town of Butare, heading for Burundi.

In Bonn, the German foreign ministry said around 100 German nationals arrived in Bujumbura Satur-

day afternoon after fleeing southern Rwanda by road.

In New York, the United Nations Security Council authorised Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to take all necessary steps to protect the 2,500 UN troops in Rwanda where they were sent to monitor a peace accord signed last August between the government and the rebel National Patriotic Front (RPF) whose members are mostly Tutsis.

Government and rebel troops clashed north of Kigali on Saturday as the RPF marched on the capital from their bases in the north. An RPF spokeswoman in neighbouring Uganda warned French troops "not to stand in the way" of the rebels.

A RPF statement broadcast by its radio monitored in Nairobi said its troops would "restore order" in Kigali. It said the situation made it "impossible to pursue application" of the Arusha agreement signed in August to end three years of civil war.

In New York, the RPF's envoy Claude Dusaidi said rebel forces would attack any foreign troops who stayed behind after evacuating their nationals. He said the evacuation should take no longer than 12 hours. But Security Council president Clin Keating of New Zealand said the operation would probably take longer.

Meanwhile the RPF's deputy leader Denis Polisi warned France Saturday "not to interfere" in

Rwanda and to "limit its action to evacuating its nationals".

In an interview with AFP, Polisi said the RPF did not recognise a new Rwandan government set up on Friday and would not negotiate with those who "massacred civilians".

However in his maiden speech, new Prime Minister Jean Kambanda called on Saturday for talks with the

RPF. "The Rwandan government believes that there is no other way of restoring peace to the country apart from continuing talks with the RPF," he said.

He said his government would try to set up transitional institutions as envisaged by the Arusha agreements, in six weeks' time.

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