

Rwandan rebels move on capital, more foreigners flee

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KIGALI, April 10 (Reuter) - Rebels advanced on Rwanda's capital as Western forces scrambled on Sunday to rescue foreigners caught up in a tribal bloodbath which has killed thousands.

France said it was sending reinforcements to Kigali to help with an international evacuation of foreigners from the central African country caught up in an orgy of violence since its president was assassinated last week.

The French Defence Ministry said 64 more French nationals were flown out to Bujumbura, capital of neighbouring Burundi, on Sunday, bringing to more than 150 the number of French citizens now rescued from the Rwandan bloodletting.

Belgian paratroops, blocked from flying into the former Belgian colony by Rwandan troops who parked firetrucks on the runway, were expected to fly to Kigali to protect some 1,500 Belgian nationals after diplomatic contacts broke a deadlock.

U.S. diplomatic sources said a third U.S. convoy arrived safely in Bujumbura by land late on Saturday. They said only eight U.S. citizens out of a total of some 230 now remained.

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."

Rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) said a 4,000-strong force was moving on the rambling, hilly city on two fronts.

An RPF official who asked not to be named said the troops had hoped to reach Kigali by dawn on Sunday but had encountered heavy resistance.

He said the rebels would reinforce a 600-strong battalion pinned down in Kigali and would engage government troops who have gone on a rampage in the city.

Relief officials said an orgy of violence which began last week after the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi were killed in a rocket attack as their plane landed in Kigali continued.

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 President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu.

A rebel 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."

The majority Hutus and the minority Tutsis, who formerly were the ruling elite of the tiny country, have long been caught up in cycles of bloodletting which have killed tens of thousands of people.

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.

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."

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