

Spanish nuns expect attack on Rwanda hospital

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MADRID, April 12 (Reuter) - Three Spanish nuns, trapped in a hospital in the Rwandan city of Kibuye with a group of terrified refugees, said on Tuesday Hutu tribesmen had entered the hospital but had not harmed anyone.

"It seems like a miracle," one of them, Sister Pilar Espelosin, 63, told Spanish national radio by telephone.

"But we do not trust them. They say that tomorrow they are going to send another group, stronger and more dangerous and that they will make us show them the building," said the nun who has maintained regular contact with Spanish radio stations.

Members of the minority Tutsi tribe took refuge in the hospital, fleeing Hutu tribesmen as Rwanda sinks into civil strife. Hutus entered the hospital on Tuesday and took money but did not harm anyone.

Espelosin, a member of the Missionary Sisters of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, said one of the nuns had to stay with the refugees at all times, because "if we all left, they would die of fear".

She said there was no hope of evacuating the refugees because they would be killed as soon as they left the hospital.

"The only thing we can do, is ease their agony, because you can imagine that knowing they are being hunted and why they are being hunted, their agony is horrific, their fear is horrific," she told Efe-radio in an earlier interview.

On Monday, Espelosin told El Pais newspaper the hospital was surrounded and the nurses had been killed.

"Hundreds (of attackers) have come down from the hills with machetes, sticks, spears and arrows. They are killing women, children, men and the elderly."

Espelosin, who has spent 22 years in Rwanda, said the nuns would not leave while there were people to care for. "Apparently it doesn't show but inside I am scared to death," she added.

A spokeswoman for the Missionary Sisters in Madrid, said the organisation had been unable to make contact with the sisters.

Foreign Affairs Minister Javier Solana said the government would do all possible to help the 135 Spaniards still in Rwanda but it did not plan to send a special aircraft to evacuate them.

"We are in contact with Belgium, France and the United Nations and the Spanish ambassadors of the surrounding countries are at the borders to help both the Spanish and non-Spanish who are leaving," he told reporters in Madrid.

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