

Italians arrive from Rwanda, telling of carnage

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ROME, April 14 (Reuter) - Refugees who arrived in Italy from Rwanda on Thursday, spoke of danger, bravery and the slaughter of children in a hospital in the central African country.

About 100 people, mostly Italians, flew into Rome, recounting scenes of carnage following last week's killing of President Juvenal Habyarimana which triggered tribal bloodletting throughout the country.

"The most horrifying thing I remember was when tens of children in a hospital were slaughtered right before my very eyes," said Monsignor Giuseppe D'Ascola, who had gone to Rwanda on an Easter mission.

"I know that other Italian missionaries decided to remain in Rwanda, but it is an incredibly dangerous situation and I am praying for them," he said.

Roberta Brusafferri, a 31-year-old volunteer worker from Bologna in central Italy, said Italy's consul in Rwanda, Antonio Costa, saved her life.

"That man personally scoured the countryside in search of Italians," she said.

"He came to my door surrounded by government troops. He was at their mercy and clearly risked his own life."

Costa and Italy's ambassador to Rwanda, Marcello Ricoveri, escaped from Rwanda and were safe in Nairobi.

Thousands of people have died since last Thursday in Rwanda, where Tutsi minority forces are trying to wrench power from the ruling Hutus.

Missionary Enrico Zabeo said government troops pulled him out of a queue to leave Kigali on Tuesday morning and asked him if he was Belgian.

"If I had said yes, I would not be here right now. They would have killed me," he said.

"The killing there is worse than in Burundi in October - and I saw that too," added Zabeo, who spent 26 years in Africa.

About 50,000 people have died in tribal warfare in neighbouring Burundi since October.

A first group of 41 Italians arrived on Thursday morning in Rome from Nairobi after being airlifted to the Kenyan capital on a military flight.

The group, mainly Roman Catholic nuns and construction workers, had been evacuated from Kigali under the protection of French and Belgian U.N. peacekeeping forces.

Another 86 people arrived on Thursday evening on an Italian Air Force flight from Nairobi via Luxor in Egypt.

They included 22 Rwandan orphans. Aged one to three, they were washed and dressed after landing and carried out in woolen blankets by smiling Italian servicemen.

They later flew to Brescia, northern Italy, where a volunteer group will arrange for their adoption or placement in foster families in Italy. Another 20 Rwandan orphans were due to arrive in Rome on Friday.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Riccardo Sessa said 173 out of 200 Italians in Rwanda had been evacuated.

“The remaining 17, mostly Catholic missionaries, have decided to stay on and see if they can help, but their lives are clearly at risk,” he said.

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