

UN Council to reduce Rwanda peacekeepers to 270

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UNITED NATIONS, April 21 (Reuter) - The Security Council late Thursday voted unanimously to pull out most U.N. troops from Rwanda where a bloody civil war is raging and tens of thousands of civilians have perished.

The council interrupted a marathon debate on Bosnia to adopt a resolution reducing the Rwanda force, once numbering 2,500, to a bare minimum of 270 military and civilian personnel.

The resolution would leave the force commander, Canadian General Romeo Dallaire, and his staff in Kigali as an intermediary between the warring Hutu and Tutsi groups and to assist relief operations.

He would be protected by an infantry company of about 150 soldiers as well as some military observers. Remaining also would be the chief U.N. civilian representative, Jacques-Roger Booh Booh of Cameroon, who would attempt to restart peace talks.

The council, however, pledged to consider promptly any recommendations to increase the force level and mandate of the U.N. operation, depending on developments.

But Rwanda's ambassador, Jean Damascene Bizimana, told the council the international community had been more concerned with the evacuation of foreigners than the "anguish of the Rwandan people and their need for order and aid."

He said some U.N. operations were enhanced, not reduced, when security deteriorated, an obvious reference to the former Yugoslavia, where the United Nations has 30,000 peacekeepers.

"This is not a proper response to this crisis," he said.

Nigeria's deputy ambassador, Isaac Ayewah, said he voted for the resolution with reluctance because he understood that additional forces could not be raised quickly.

But he asked whether "we as a community have really exerted our best efforts to assist the people of Rwanda" or "whether the United Nations will turn its back on Rwanda."

The U.N. Assistance Mission For Rwanda, known as UNAMIR, was created in October at the instigation of France as a traditional peacekeeping force to help implement an August peace agreement leading to elections.

But the U.N. troops, who did not have a mandate to use force except in self-defence, were caught in tribal violence set off by the assassination of Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana on April 6.

UNAMIR has already been reduced from 2,500 troops and support personnel. Only 1,570 military personnel remain, including 180 unarmed military observers.

Belgium had unilaterally withdrawn its 430 peacekeepers after 10 were killed, presumably by the late president's personal guard. On Wednesday, 213 soldiers from Bangladesh left the Rwandese capital of Kigali, along with 114 Ghanaians.

Boutros-Ghali earlier Thursday gave the council the alternative of reinforcing UNAMIR with several thousand troops and changing its mandate to coerce combatants into a ceasefire. He said Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni urged him to maintain a large operation and had offered to recruit troops from the region.

He also made it clear that the killings, estimated in the tens of thousands, were started by the late president's "unruly" guard. In response, the predominantly Tutsi Rwandese Patriotic Front fought government troops.

He said the country's provisional government then disintegrated, some of them assassinated in the violence by Hutu government forces, including the country's prime minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana.

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