

Belgium strongly condemns death of African presidents

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BRUSSELS, April 7 (Reuter) - Belgium expressed outrage on Thursday at the deaths of the presidents of Burundi and Rwanda and called for the United Nations to strengthen its mandate in Rwanda where an orgy of violence following the killings.

Foreign Minister Willy Claes, on a visit to Romania, told Belgian news agency Belga he would appeal to the United Nations later on Thursday to strengthen its mandate in Rwanda.

"I would like this as a precautionary measure so that the situation does not become out of control in Rwanda," Claes said in Bucharest.

Earlier, the foreign ministry strongly condemned the deaths of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira, who were travelling together when their plane was downed by a rocket over Kigali.

"We learned with astonishment of the brutal attack against an aircraft

over (the Rwandan capital) Kigali, which cost the lives of the presidents of Burundi and Rwanda," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

"We strongly condemn this loss which could seriously put into question the precarious balance in the two countries," the statement added.

Troops, presidential guards and gendarmes rampaged through the Rwandan capital Kigali on Thursday following the killing of the two presidents, leading to Claes' call for the U.N.'s mandate to be beefed up.

"The feeling is that the United Nations mandate is very narrow and that our troops can do little more than stage patrols," a Belgian diplomatic source said.

There are about 450 Belgian troops in Rwanda as part of a team of 2,500 U.N. peacekeepers overseeing the central African country's transition to democracy.

Belgium, the former colonial ruler

of both countries, called for an impartial inquiry to determine who was responsible for killing the two presidents.

“We appeal to the authorities (in the two countries) to calm down the situation, condemn all forms of violence and preserve the peace and the democracy process,” the foreign ministry said.

A foreign ministry spokesman

said diplomats were on permanent standby in case the estimated 1,500 Belgian nationals in Rwanda and 1,200 in neighbouring Burundi were threatened in the latest violence.

“There has not been any suggestion yet that the Belgians should leave, but we are closely monitoring the situation,” the spokesman told Reuters.

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