

Three Belgium U.N. officers killed in Rwanda

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UNITED NATIONS, April 7 (Reuter) - The United Nations said Thursday that three Belgian U.N. infantry soldiers were killed in Rwanda's capital Kigali which fell into chaos after the killing of the country's president and prime minister.

U.N. spokesman Joe Sills had said the Belgian soldiers were military observers but U.N. officials as well as Belgian diplomats later said they were part of the more than 400 troops Belgium has in the peacekeeping operation.

A spokesman for Belgium's U.N. mission said the troops were guarding the prime minister of Rwanda's house before she was killed.

He said Belgium had lost track of 10 soldiers serving with the United Nations. "It is possible that the three bodies who have been sited might be one of the 10," he added. But he said Belgium still had to identify the bodies.

A U.N. spokesman in Kigali said Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe

Uwilingiyimana was killed Thursday near the presidential palace.

U.N. officials in New York said the prime minister left the palace under U.N. guard. The guard was disarmed and she fled to the compound of the U.N. Development Programme in Rwanda, which includes civilian aid volunteers. Armed men then broke into the compound and took her away.

Her husband and two children as well as prime minister designate, Faustin Twagiramungu, currently are in U.N. protective custody, the officials said.

Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, 57, and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira, 38, were killed late Wednesday when rockets downed their plane as they came back from a peace conference in Tanzania. Both were from the majority Hutu tribe long at odds with the Tutsi minority in both countries.

The United Nations has a peacekeeping force of 2,500 in Rwanda and about 250 civilians in Burundi in a

now-futile effort to maintain a cease-fire between the Hutu-dominated government and the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front.

U.N. spokesman Fred Eckhard said the United Nations was attempting to form a "peace committee" of political parties, military officers and police "in an effort to establish some authority in Kigali that can restore order."

He said there was calm in Burundi at the moment but fears that the bloodletting in Rwanda would spread

there.

Bitter rivalry between the Hutu and Tutsi, former feudal overlords, predates Rwanda's and Burundi's independence from Belgium in 1962.

Tens of thousands of Tutsi and Hutu have died in ethnic slaughter in both countries over the years. The death toll in Burundi since renegade troops killed its first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, on October 21 is up to 50,000.

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