Belgian troops trapped "like rats" at Kigali airport: Claes

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BRUSSELS, April 16 (AFP) - Some 400 Belgian UN peacekeeping troops are "trapped like rats" at Kigali airport, Belgian Foreign Minister Willy Claes said Saturday, saying it was urgent his country's force quit the war-torn Rwandan capital.

"They are trapped like rats and we have information from very good sources that armed Rwandan (rebel) forces are preparing to attack the airport, while the chaos in Kigali is growing by the hour and anti-Belgian sentiment is still intense," he told journalists.

Claes added that the commander of the United Nations assistance mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), General Romeo Dallaire, had been charged with ensuring the safe departure of the Belgian troops along with around 100 European and Rwandan refugees still at the airport.

"There is no time to lose, the runway at Kigali airport is in danger of being destroyed," he said.

Belgium has decided to pull out its troops from Rwanda, where 10 days of inter-ethnic bloodletting following the April 6 death of the country's long-ruling Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana in a plane crash has ravaged the country and left thousands dead.

Claes's comments came as the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front issued a list of preconditions for ceasefire talks with the government forces, including the dissolution of the interim government and of the Hutu-led presidential guard.

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