

Officials take refuge in French embassy as clashes continue

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PARIS, April 8 (AFP) - Some 50 senior Rwandan officials and ministers have taken refuge in Kigali's French embassy, French Cooperation Minister Michel Roussin said here Friday.

The report came as worsening ethnic clashes in the Rwandan capital, following the deaths of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in a plane crash Wednesday night, forced medical agencies to evacuate staff.

Around 50 ministers, senior officials and their families had been inside the embassy since Thursday night, Roussin told AFP. He said a contingent of around 30 soldiers had been deployed around the embassy to protect those inside.

Roussin confirmed fresh clashes Friday in the capital between national army troops and rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR), but ruled out any new French military intervention in Rwanda, saying the priority

was to save lives.

France deployed an intervention force in the tiny east African country between October 1990 and last December.

Meanwhile aid officials said that the bloodletting between opposing Hutu and Tutsi tribesmen, had left a "considerable number" of people wounded.

The Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross said its team of a doctor and three nurses in Kigali had transported medical equipment to one of the city's two main hospitals and was now trying to reach the second one.

The Red Cross added that a surgical team was currently on standby in Geneva for a swift transfer to Kigali.

Separately in Paris, the aid groups Medecins du Monde and Pharmaciens sans Frontieres said in a statement they had decided to evacuate their teams from Rwanda to

safeguard members' lives.

"No medical intervention is possible in the chaos which has taken over Kigali, where more and more massacres are being carried out without the chance of any help being given to those who are directly under threat," the statement said.

Roussin said no definitive decision had been taken on whether to evacuate the 600-odd French nationals currently based in the country, adding that "technical measures" were being studied for such an eventuality.

Informed sources in Paris earlier said that repatriation could be carried out once Kigali airport has been secured by UN forces via an airlift using planes brought over from Cen-

tral African Republic, where French troops have been placed on alert.

The worsening violence was sparked by a plane crash at Kigali airport Wednesday in which President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed along with Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira. The Rwandan defence ministry said the plane was brought down by rocket fire.

Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana was also murdered, and other reports, still to be confirmed officially, said Hutu presidential guards had rounded up some government ministers drawn from the Tutsi opposition and killed them.

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