Peace talks to resume as UN probes massacre report

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KIGALI, April 16 (AFP) - Rwandan rebel commanders and government negotiators were due to hold a second round of UN-sponsored talks Saturday on ending 10 days of ethnic bloodshed, UN officials said

Commanders of the minority Tutsti-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and military officers from the Hutu-led government were to meet at the Meridien hotel, in an RPF-held zone of Kigali, following a one-hour meeting late Friday which failed to agree a truce.

Meanwhile military observers from the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) left Kigali Saturday to investigate reports that Hutus massacred nearly 1,200 Tutsis, many of them children, who had taken refuge in a church in Musha, about 25 kilometers (12 miles) east of Kigali.

UNAMIR officials have declined to comment on the reports, which quote priests present during the killing on Wednesday.

Also Saturday, the International Red Cross said it was tentatively resuming operations in Kigali after receiving assurances from local officials that their staff and ambulances would not come under attack.

The Red Cross suspended its operations Thursday after six wounded people being taken to hospital in a Red Cross vehicle were murdered by armed marauders.

At Friday's meeting, RPF commanders and government army officers failed to agree on a truce, but exchanged ceasefire proposals that should provide the basis for Saturday's talks.

The meeting was attended by the commander of UN forces in Rwanda, General Romeo Dallaire, and UN special envoy Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh.

"It's the start of the beginning of discussions," said UN spokesman

Moctar Gueye. "The fact that they are meeting is in itself a big step forward."

Gueye said tens of thousands of people were feared to have been killed in ethnic slaughter which sparked by the death in a plane crash of the long-ruling Hutu president, Juvenal Habyarimana, in an apparent assassination.

"We'll never know the true extent of the massacres," he said.

The breakup of Friday's talks was followed by an intense half-hour exchange of artillery fire between the two sides, but only sporadic gunfire could be heard early Saturday.

At UN headquarters in New York, the Security Council called early Saturday for an immediate ceasefire in the east African nation..

The current council president, Colin Keating of New Zealand, said late Friday: "In the members view, the immediate priority in Rwanda is the establishment of a ceasefire between the government forces and the RPF."

"The situation is grave and council members are determined not to allow the security of UNAMIR personnel to be placed at serious risk," he said, referring to the UN mission established to implement a peace agreement signed last August between the rebels and government.

That agreement, which involved a power-sharing arrangement between Tutsis and Hutus and plans for elections next year, collapsed following Habyarimana's death on April 6.

But the council was unable to decide on the future of the UNAMIR operation following Belgium's decision to withdraw its 400-member contingent in light of the fighting.

Differences persist among the 15 council members over whether to maintain the peacekeeping presence, now reduced to some 2,000 soldiers from some 20 nations, or cut back to a symbolic diplomatic presence if there is no ceasefire agreement.

"Council members intend to keep under constant review the force levels and activities of UNAMIR and to take decisions in this regard at the appropriate time," Keating said.