

# Rwanda rebels demand guarantees on French pullout

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ARUSHA, Tanzania, March 16 (AFP) - Rebels demanded assurances that Rwanda's government would stick to an agreement for French troops to quit the country as the two sides opened Tanzanian-mediated peace talks here Tuesday.

Sources close to the negotiations said the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) had urged the government to honour a March 7 agreement calling for the replacement of nearly 700 French soldiers protecting foreigners in Rwanda by forces of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

The rebel demand followed an announcement Sunday by Rwanda's President Juvenal Habyarimana denying an earlier statement by Prime Minister Dismas Nsengiyaremye that the French forces would start withdrawing on the day the peace talks opened.

Habyarimana, who has often

clashed with the coalition interim government he installed to pave the way for democracy, said the French troops would stay until the rebels withdrew from territory they captured in the latest upsurge of fighting last month.

But the rebels have refused to cede any ground until a broader agreement emerges from the negotiations.

A joint communique signed by the government and rebels after a three-day meeting in the Tanzanian city of Dar es Salaam earlier this month called for all foreign troops to leave Rwanda within eight days from Wednesday and be replaced by U.N. and OAU peacekeepers, rebel sources said.

But diplomats in the region ruled out the possibility that a U.N. force could deploy in Rwanda next week.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali still has to report on

how U.N. and OAU troops could police a proposed buffer zone between rebel and government positions. The security council would also have to approve the force, the diplomats said. more AFP AFP SEQN-0291