Some 10,000 displaced in week-old Rwandan conflict: UNHCR

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GENEVA, April 13 (AFP) - UN refugee officials on Wednesday prepared to send emergency food aid for some 10,000 people they said have been displaced in the latest outbreak of ethnic bloodletting in the eastern African state of Rwanda.

The refugees were fleeing both Rwanda and neighboring Burundi, which has remained calm but where fears were high that the week-old troubles between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority – the ethnic makeup in both countries – might spill across the border.

Emergency food supplies for Rwanda have been set up in northern Burundi, western Tanzania and eastern Zaire, according to spokesmen for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who said humanitarian organizations held urgent talks Wednesday to coordinate the aid to the region.

UNHCR spokesman Christiane Berthiaume said plans were also underway to resupply refugee camps in northern Rwanda, where thousands of people displaced by earlier massacres were stranded by the latest fighting with only a 10-day food supply left.

The UNHCR said Tuesday it was granted permission by Burundi to cross its northern border to reach the camps in Rwanda.

Berthiaume said at least 10,000 people were caught in a back-and-forth refugee flow, after years of ethnic tensions, and "are afraid."

Some 7,000 Burundian refugees in Rwanda have either fled back to Burundi or to Zaire, she said. These Burundians had already fled ethnic slaughters that erupted in their own country triggered by an attempted coup in the capital Bujumbura last October.

Another 5,000 people in Burundi meanwhile fled to Zaire, the

spokesman said.

Two UNHCR teams were preparing to leave Geneva to boost the 30 international aid workers redeployed in Burundi and Zaire after being evacuated from Rwanda.

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