

US Marines to land in Burundi after trouble in Rwanda: UN envoy

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BUJUMBURA, April 9 (AFP) - Some 200 US Marines were to arrive Saturday morning in the Burundi capital to help with any possible evacuation of foreign residents from strife-torn neighboring Rwanda, a UN envoy said.

Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, the UN special representative in Bujumbura, said their mission would be strictly humanitarian.

The American soldiers were to arrive on board four or five planes, including two C-130 transport aircraft, supply planes and two or three helicopters, according to the envoy. He did not give other details or say from where the US troops were flying in.

Washington asked Burundi authorities late Friday for permission to land troops in the capital Bujumbura, he said.

It was given the go-ahead by the special interim committee headed by national assembly speaker Sylvestre

Ntibantunganya set up to handle matters following the deaths of the Rwandan and Burundi presidents, Juvenal Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntaryamira, in a plane crash in Kigali late Wednesday that touched off the latest inter-ethnic fighting.

Though both countries have a history of ethnic trouble between the majority Tutsis and the minority Hutus, Burundi has remained calm unlike Rwanda where thousands have reportedly been killed – including the Rwandan prime minister and 10 UN peacekeepers from Belgium – in the trouble that erupted after the plane crash.

Kigali was reportedly fairly calm Saturday morning. A UN statement issued in New York said fighting in Rwanda had died down after fighters agreed Friday on a ceasefire to stop the bloodshed and the formation of a transitional government.

France landed 280 paratroopers

flown in from Central Africa at the airport in the Rwandan capital Kigali Saturday to protect French citizens stranded in Rwanda since the trouble erupted after the crash of the presidents' plane, which was reportedly shot down.

Foreign and defense ministry officials in Paris said the soldiers were sent in to "ensure security" for a possible evacuation of French citizens.

Ould Abdallah said "we are very happy that Bujumbura, which until recently was still a city in crisis, has

become the center for sending out humanitarian help" in the current crisis.

Clashes between Hutus and Tutsi left several dead in recent weeks in areas around the Burundian capital, which has seen the death of two presidents in six months.

Ntaryamira's predecessor, Melchior Ndadaye who was Burundi's first Hutu president, died after only four months in power in an abortive coup staged by Tutsi soldiers.

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