Warring factions agree to Rwandan peace talks

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UNITED NATIONS, April 13 (AFP) - The rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and Rwandan government forces agreed Wednesday to meet for talks on a ceasefire Thursday in Kigali under UN auspices, the Security Council president said.

"That is the first optimistic sign we have seen perhaps since the beginning of this crisis," said the Security Council president, Colin Keating of New Zealand

Keating added that word of the meeting had come from the war-torn capital of Kigali.

Earlier Wednesday the RPF had ruled out a ceasefire call from the government.

In an interview in Kigali with Radio France Internationale (RFI), monitored in Nairobi, the rebels said their headquarters had rejected the idea of a truce.

"Let me make this very clear: the contacts we have had with the UN have nothing to do with a general ceasefire, or with negotiations leading to the formation of a transitional government", RPF spokesman Liogene Rudasingwa said.

He said the contacts were about security guarantees for the evacuation of French, Belgian and US nationals.

"Our position is very clear. We have no desire to have a dialogue with these criminals", Rudasingwa said.

Earlier, the rebel radio said it would not consider a ceasefire request by government forces, unless the army first pledged to fight elements of the presidential guard.

The force is blamed for massacres that have erupted in the capital since a plane crash last week that killed Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira.

The RPF earlier announced that its forces from the north had linked up with a rebel battalion in Kigali and had taken control of four strategic points in the capital.

In a broadcast monitored by the

BBC, the rebel radio Muhabura also said the northern region of Mutara had been "entirely liberated" on Tuesday, while RPF forces had encircled government positions in the northern town of Byumba.

It said the rebel attack in Byumba was halted because the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) wanted a ceasefire to evacuate its forces there.

"There is not a single indication that the government army is able to resist RPF forces in Kigali", the radio added.

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