Withdrawal of Belgian troops

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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.

The news came after the RPF had rejected a ceasefire call from the government.

"Our position is very clear. We have no desire to have a dialogue with these criminals", RPF spokesman Liogene Rudasingwa said in a radio interview in Kigali monitored in Nairobi.

He stressed that contacts with UN personnel were solely about security guarantees for the evacuation of French, Belgian and US nationals.

But Keating said the RPF had agreed to talks with government forces under the auspices of the UN mission in Rwanda and that rebels had said they would favor the establishment of a "broad-based government" in Kigali.

The diplomat said however fighting continued in Rwanda, where RPF is blamed for the massacres that erupted after a plane crash last week killed Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira.

"The situation is still dangerous," he said, adding that the council was calling for an immediate end to the fighting.

He ruled out withdrawing peacekeepers from Rwanda, saying "it is not an option" for the Security Council, but also dismissed the possibility of beefing up the operation and opening the door to military action.

Earlier, Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali announced

that Belgium was withdrawing its peacekeepers from Rwanda and warned that the UN mission there was facing some difficult decisions.

The Security Council is to consider what steps to take now that the UN peacekeepers have evacuated all foreigners from the war-torn east African country.

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 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.

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