

# Belgium evacuates nationals, closes embassy

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BRUSSELS, April 12 (Reuter) - Belgium evacuated most Belgians living in Rwanda on Tuesday and closed its embassy, moving staff to the relative safety of the airport in the blood-drenched capital Kigali.

Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene told Belgian television the government had decided to close its embassy in Rwanda, in line with other western nations.

“We asked the ambassador, who did a good job but was a target of the military, to close the embassy and leave the country,” Dehaene said.

The Foreign Ministry said five embassy staff were still at Kigali airport and would leave the country when the evacuation was completed.

Dehaene said he expected Foreign Minister Willy Claes to have talks with United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali later on Tuesday about the future of the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Rwanda, a former Belgian colony.

Belgium has more than 400 troops serving in Rwanda as part of the 2,500-strong U.N. force.

An army spokesman said virtually all Belgians wanting to leave had been evacuated and that Kigali was practically empty of Westerners.

There had been an estimated 1,500 Belgians in Rwanda.

The first Belgians evacuated by paratroops from Rwanda arrived in Brussels on Tuesday, with tales of the butchery and horror they witnessed during days of ethnic slaughter.

Many were too shocked to speak of their experiences in Kigali, while others described seeing mutilated corpses in the streets when they dared to leave their houses.

Belgium, like other Western nations, evacuated its nationals from the tiny central African state following the violence that flared last week after the president was assassinated in a rocket attack on his plane.

Marc Hellingh, who had been visiting friends, described seeing Rwandans armed with machetes at the roadside and trucks piled with bodies. “It was butchery,” he said.

A DC-10 flew 192 evacuees into Brussels national airport early on Tuesday and a further 204 people arrived on a Boeing 747 a few hours later.

A Boeing 747 carrying about 400 evacuees is expected in Brussels on Wednesday, the fifth plane in the Belgian operation.

The Belgian telephone company Belgacom said it was halving temporarily its prices for calls to Rwanda so people could contact friends and relations more

easily.

The evacuees, who are mostly Belgians, had been airlifted from Kigali to Nairobi in Belgian military C-130 planes and then flown to Brussels on planes belonging to the Belgian national airline Sabena.

Mireille Jacob, a Belgian who had been on her first visit to Rwanda said she had stayed inside for five days and nights during the fighting.

“The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) were behind us and the government troops in front – our house was between. If they had wanted to touch us, they could have,” she said.

“We had no electricity or telephone, and had to eat what we had – pancakes, potatoes. There was looting,” she added, describing seeing mutilated corpses.

The Belgians are unpopular among the majority Hutu tribe which believes they support the rebels. There were also rumours in Kigali that Belgium was involved in the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana. Belgium has denied both charges.

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