

Spain to send transport planes to Rwanda

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MADRID, April 13 (Reuter) - Spain will send transport aircraft to Rwanda to help evacuate European nationals from the central African country, Defence Minister Julian Garcia Vargas said on Wednesday.

“The Belgian authorities have accepted the offer made on Monday to send Spanish aircraft to evacuate Europeans and tomorrow a Hercules will leave to fly the route between Kigali and Nairobi in Kenya,” Vargas told journalists in Madrid.

A defence ministry spokeswoman said one Hercules C-130 plane would leave the military base at Zaragoza later on Wednesday. Another was ready to go but she could not give a time for its departure.

Spain has also offered to send troops to Rwanda, which is experiencing a new bout in the centuries-old bloodletting between Hutus and the Tutsi minority. The offer has not been taken up but the troops remain on alert.

Vargas said three Spanish nuns, who had agreed to be evacuated from their hospital in Kibuye where they were trapped with a group of Tutsis, could be out of danger on Wednesday or at least by Thursday.

The nuns had at first refused to leave the hospital, as they feared the Tutsis would be killed by Hutu fighters gathered outside, but then changed their mind and said they would go if a Rwandan colleague was also evacuated.

The Hercules planes are expected to fly the Kigali-Nairobi route for four or five days, after which time it is expected that all Europeans will have been evacuated from Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi.

Vargas said there were already 13 planes working the Kigali-Nairobi route, eight from Belgium, three from Italy and one each from the Netherlands and Canada.

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