

Belgians try to quit Kigali, airport attacked

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KIGALI, April 14 (Reuter) - The last Belgian forces prepared to quit the Rwandan capital Kigali on Thursday hours before the expiry of a rebel ultimatum to all foreign forces to leave a city traumatised by a week of tribal slaughter.

But the international airport, where Belgian paratroops and a handful of remaining expatriates were gathering, came under missile attack. Witnesses said at least six missiles slammed into the airport from rebel positions on the edges of the city.

Aid workers said it was not clear whether it was still possible to fly out or whether the only way out of the blood-drenched capital, bracing for a fresh round of killing, was by land to Bujumbura, capital of neighbouring Burundi.

"It's a general massacre, there are massacres going on all over the city and the country. The army is massacring, homes are being burned down, the lot," said one aid worker.

He said the slum areas of Nyamirambo and Bugasere in the southwest and southeast of the capital where rebels have infiltrated were out of control.

Heavy fighting between regular army units and infiltrating rebels of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) broke out around dawn for the second day running.

Belgium, the only western country with forces still in the remote central African state, wants to comply with an RPF ultimatum which said foreign troops sent to evacuate their own citizens must be out by midnight local time (2200 GMT).

A total of 16 Belgians, 10 of them U.N. peacekeepers, have been killed in the violence raging in their former colony, one of the poorest and smallest countries in the world.

Overnight on Wednesday Belgian paratroops protecting the French school evacuation point in central Kigali pulled out. A mob of about 100 looters moved in to grab possessions left by foreigners.

Dawn brought more terror to a city torn apart in seven days of tribal carnage sparked by last Wednesday's killing of Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana. Tens of thousands are believed to have perished since a rocket attack on his plane in which the president of neighbouring Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira, also died as they returned from regional peace talks in Tanzania.

Hutu tribesmen, backed by army soldiers and terrified of reprisal massacres by the Tutsi-dominated RPF, erected more roadblocks across the rambling city

on Thursday.

Many were drunk on banana beer after another night of killing.

As the morning mist cleared over the cool, green hills of the remote central African capital, soldiers at one checkpoint stood swigging beer from two-litre bottles. Three badly mutilated corpses lay nearby.

Midway between checkpoints, four more bodies were laid out – one a young boy aged about 10, shot through the left eye.

At the compound of the international Red Cross, staff barricaded the main entrances and windows with bags of European Union rice – donated to help hungry refugees devastated by three years of civil war.

Many expatriate staff wept openly, unable to respond to a stream of telephone calls from some 120 local staff trapped in their houses and fearing the arrival of the death squads. They said they had heard several local staff were already dead.

Red Cross officials said too many neighbourhoods were now no-go areas with terrified local people slaughtering anyone they did not recognise.

In Brussels, Belgian Foreign Minister Willy Claes said on Thursday that Belgium had also decided to withdraw its contingent of United Nations peacekeepers from Rwanda.

“The Belgian blue helmets will stay under no circumstances,” Claes told a news conference. “No matter what the decision of the (U.N.) Security Council may be, they will not continue to take part in the (U.N. operation).”

He said the presence of the Blue Helmets had been unable to prevent the deaths of tens of thousands of people and there was such an anti-Belgian climate in the country that Belgium could no longer take the responsibility of endangering its soldiers further.

“We do not believe that the presence of the Blue Helmets in the current situation makes any sense,” he said.

U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has urged the Security Council to decide quickly what to do with the remaining members of a 2,500-strong force originally sent to monitor a shattered peace accord.

Aid workers said they had heard rumours they would soon pull out.

The RPF denied a U.N. report it had agreed to a ceasefire with representatives of a rump government.

“We are not going to negotiate a ceasefire with anyone,” RPF spokesman Wilson Rutayisire told a Reuter reporter at the rebels’ base of Mulindi north of Kigali.

RPF radio added the rebels would talk only to those who had distanced themselves from the “clique of killers”.

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