

# Belgium mourns Rwandan dead, last troops set to leave

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BRUSSELS, April 14 (Reuter) - Belgium on Thursday mourned 16 of its people killed in Rwanda and said it would pull its United Nations peacekeepers out of the country.

At a ceremony in Brussels King Albert and government ministers paid homage to 10 Belgian paratroops killed in Kigali last week as an orgy of bloodletting swept the Rwandan capital after the death of the president.

Six Belgian civilians were also killed in the violence.

Belgian foreign minister Willy Claes said on Thursday that Belgium had decided to withdraw its contingent of U.N. peacekeepers from Rwanda.

"We do not believe that the presence of the blue helmets in the current situation makes any sense," he told a press conference.

Around 200 distraught relatives and friends of the dead soldiers stood silently in the military chapel as the coffins were carried in, each decorated with a simple spray of lilies and draped with the Belgian flag.

The king, visibly moved, spent several minutes talking to members of the soldiers' families, taking the arm of one crying woman and holding the hand of a young man clearly racked with grief.

Outside the military hospital where the ceremony took place dozens of people, including Belgians evacuated from Rwanda, gathered in silence.

The government said flags would fly at half mast from Thursday to midday Saturday "for our victims in Rwanda" and a minute's silence was observed at military bases throughout the country.

The soldiers were killed as they tried to protect Rwandan prime minister Agathe Uwilingyimana.

Claes said the presence of the U.N. troops had not prevented 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.

"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)."

U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said on Wednesday he had called for plans to be drawn up for a possible withdrawal of the U.N. force in

Rwanda in the light of Belgium's decision to pull out its 420-man contingent.

He said he was notified of Belgium's intention when he met Claes in Bonn on Tuesday.

Defence Minister Leo Delcroix said on Belgian radio the troops could take several weeks to leave but paratroops sent to evacuate nationals are expected to leave within a few days.

"We're in Rwanda with quite a bit of material. As a result it will take a few days at least to get the logistical operation behind us, and for the whole (withdrawal) perhaps a few weeks," Delcroix told Belgian BRTN radio.

The withdrawal from Rwanda was "Belgium's Saigon", the Belgian daily De Standaard said comparing it to the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975.

There were an estimated 1,500 Belgians in Rwanda, the largest group of Westerners.

An army spokesman said there were practically no more Belgian civilians left in Rwanda but paratroops were still searching for a few remaining Westerners outside the capital.

Belgian paratroops protecting the French School evacuation point in central Kigali pulled out overnight.

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