

Belgium criticises U.N. mandate in Rwanda

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BRUSSELS, April 20 (Reuter) - Belgian Defence Minister Leo Delcroix criticised the United Nations on Wednesday for its inflexible mandate in strife-torn Rwanda where 10 Belgian U.N. peacekeepers were killed in tribal bloodshed.

"Delcroix has for many months pleaded for a more flexible mandate for the local U.N. commanders, who are the best placed to take rapid decisions and implement them," a defence ministry statement said.

"This is necessary to assure the security of our men and the efficiency of missions," it added.

Belgium evacuated all of its 450 troops from Rwanda after 10 peacekeepers died while trying in vain to defend the prime minister who was hunted down after President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a rocket attack on his plane on April 6.

The final batch of 300 Belgian peacekeepers was airlifted to neighbouring Tanzania on Tuesday night and then onto Kenya where they boarded flights for home.

Delcroix, who visited Rwanda last month, has in the past complained the U.N.'s mandate was too limited to have any real impact. Under the rules of engagement, peacekeepers could only fire in self-defence.

Despite criticism of the U.N.'s mandate in Rwanda, Delcroix's ministry said Belgium remained committed to taking part in future peacekeeping operations.

"For more than two years, over 12,000 Belgian troops have taken part, always with the will to do a good job, in diverse U.N. operations, in Rwanda, Somalia, ex-Yugoslavia and Cambodia," the defence ministry said.

"It is our responsibility to take part in these operations which try to defuse conflicts threatening international security," the statement added.

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