

U.N. emergency team to fly to Kigali on Friday

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GENEVA, April 22 (Reuter) - A U.N. emergency team is due to fly from Nairobi to Kigali on Friday to assess relief needs in the capital and outlying areas, U.N. officials said.

Medicines and health kits are also to be airlifted into the Rwandan capital aboard a separate C-130 Hercules aircraft provided by the Royal Canadian Air Force to the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF).

"Both flights are supposed to leave Nairobi today," a UNICEF spokeswoman told Reuters in Geneva.

"They are on standby. Landing in Kigali appears to be the main problem," she added.

The assessment team is being led by the U.N. Department for Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), which on Thursday warned in a statement : "The possibility of epidemics occurring in Kigali is increasing as disposal of corpses becomes overwhelming."

The missions follow a unanimous decision by the Security Council to cut down its peacekeeping force in Rwanda to 270 troops - despite fears that a withdrawal would only increase carnage in the central African state.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Thursday it would be a mistake for the U.N. forces to pull out, adding it had rarely witnessed massacres on such a scale.

The ICRC has 30 delegates in Rwanda, but because of continued fighting has been able to treat only 600 wounded.

Meanwhile, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said on Friday that 16,870 people had been killed in nine villages around Cyangugu, in southwestern Rwanda, during two weeks of inter-ethnic fighting.

"The massacres were indescribable. Most killed were men and children," a UNHCR spokesman told Reuters.

UNHCR also said that 90,000 people had fled Rwanda for four neighbouring countries, nearly doubling the number in just two days.

The agency said the new figure included 50,000 Burundis who have returned to their homeland since the presidents of the two countries were killed when their plane was shot down on April 6. In addition, 12,000 Rwandans have crossed over into Burundi.

"About 150 Rwandan refugees have been treated for machete and gun shot wounds in northern Burundi," UNHCR spokesman Ron Redmond told the same

briefing in Geneva.

There are also 18,000 refugees registered in Tanzania, about 5,500 in Uganda and 4,600 in Zaire, according to the UNHCR.

At least 27 refugees were killed trying to cross from Rwanda into Zaire, according to the agency.

UNHCR also expressed its continuing concern for nearly 6,000 people being held by police and militia in a stadium in Cyangugu. "The situation appears desperate, they have no food or water," an agency spokesman told Reuters.

"About 150 of the people being held in the stadium in Cyangugu have machete wounds. They have been attacked, obviously, in the stadium. We have no other details."

On Tuesday, UNICEF flew three tonnes of emergency food supplies for children into Kigali aboard a C-130 Hercules aircraft also provided by Canada. The flight carried half a tonne of chlorine to purify water and 1.65 tonnes of oral rehydration salts to prevent outbreaks of diarrhoea.

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