

Rwandan ceasefire signed, raising hopes of peace

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ARUSHA, Tanzania, July 14 (AFP) - The Rwandan government and rebels have signed a ceasefire and agreed to open peace talks to end a 21-month war that has uprooted at least a quarter of a million people.

In a joint communique issued late Monday after four days of talks, the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and government announced that their fighters would observe a truce starting Sunday, and a full ceasefire would become effective at midnight on July 31.

The ceasefire will be monitored by 50 military observers from Nigeria, Senegal and Zimbabwe, and by rebel and government representatives, the communique said.

The guerrilla war in Rwanda has pitted the RPF, drawn mainly from the minority Tutsi tribe, against the army, dominated by the majority Hutu.

The RPF invaded Rwanda from

neighbouring Uganda to press demands for the return of thousands of Tutsi driven into exile 30 years ago, when the Hutu seized power from them in uprisings which killed 100,000 people.

The ceasefire was originally to be endorsed Sunday, but last-minute bargaining delayed the signing until late Monday (eds : correct), Tanzanian mediators said.

The communique said negotiations on a comprehensive peace plan would open in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha on August 10 in the hope of signing a peace accord by October 10.

The RPF and the government agreed to form a joint political and military commission by July 26 which will supervise the ceasefire and any future peace accord.

The communique said the two sides had agreed that the Rwandan army should absorb the RPF fighters,

many of them the sons and daughters of Tutsi exiles born in squalid refugee camps in neighbouring countries.
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