

Rwandan government and rebels agree to end fighting

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DAR ES SALAAM, March 7 (AFP) - The Rwandan government and rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) Sunday agreed to end all military hostilities by midnight on Tuesday and to resume their stalled peace talks in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha on March 15.

According to a joint communique signed after three days of tough negotiations chaired by Tanzanian Prime Minister John Malecela, "the negotiations shall be completed within three weeks and the signing of the peace agreement by the first week of April".

The Arusha talks stalled earlier last month after RPF launched fresh attacks against government forces to stop an alleged massacre of the minority Tutsi tribe by government forces and Hutu supporters of President Juvenal Habyarimana.

The rebels have since been battling troops and are reported to have advanced to only 30 kilometres (18

miles) from the Rwandan capital, Kigali.

The signing of the communique was delayed for 24 hours after a wording dispute regarding the presence of nearly 700 French troops in Rwanda, ostensibly to protect more than 400 French residents and other foreigners.

RPF demanded that the communique should explicitly mention the withdrawal of French soldiers, but the government wanted reference made only to "foreign troops".

The rebels claimed that French soldiers were fighting alongside Rwandan government troops, and French diplomats and Rwandan officials alleged that the Ugandan army was backing the rebels.

The dispute was resolved Sunday afternoon when both sides agreed that the clause on foreign soldiers should read : "...immediate withdrawal of foreign troops and their replacement by a neutral international

force organised under the aegis of the and the United Nations (UN).”
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