

UN assessment mission arrives in Burundi

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BUJUMBURA, Feb 10 (AFP) - A UN Security Council mission arrived in Burundi on Friday to assess the political and ethnic crisis in the country, which is at risk of a bloodbath between its Hutu majority and Tutsi minority.

Burundi's opposition parties have joined forces in demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko, a moderate Hutu who heads a coalition government formed late last year in a bid to stave off mass violence.

The team, which made no statement to reporters on its arrival here, is due to stay in Burundi for two days before going to neighbouring Rwanda, which has a similar population mix and was plunged into ethnic carnage for three months last year.

The violence erupted after the deaths in the same suspicious plane crash of the Hutu presidents of both countries over the Rwandan capital

Kigali. Delegates in the mission come from China, the Czech Republic, Germany, Honduras, Indonesia, Nigeria and the United States.

In October 1993, about 50,000 people are estimated to have died in ethnic clashes in Burundi after the country's first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, was killed in a foiled military coup bid which the government survived.

Outbreaks of strife have occurred several times since.

The current political crisis was sparked by Kanyenkiko's refusal in December to heed the demands of his own, mainly Tutsi, opposition party to quit the government in response to a parliamentary crisis.

On its arrival, the UN team went into talks with government representatives.

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