

U.N. begins airlift of emergency food to Rwanda

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NAIROBI, 24 Feb (AFP) - The U.N. World Food Programme (WFP) will Wednesday begin emergency food airlifts to areas in northern Rwanda where fighting has cut off relief work, the agency said in a statement here Wednesday.

A WFP-chartered cargo plane is scheduled to make its first flight from Entebbe in Uganda to the Rwandan capital, Kigali, carrying 45 tonnes of maize.

"WFP has resorted to airlift because of serious bottlenecks in the transport of food to Rwanda, mainly because of insecurity on the roads," WFP executive director, Catherine Bertini was quoted in the statement as saying.

She urged all parties involved in the fighting to "respect the humanitarian nature of the operation and ensure its safety".

The programme's airlift operation

is expected to deliver a total of 4,000 tonnes in the next four weeks using an Ilyushin 76 to make three daily trips laden with an average of 45 tonnes of food.

From Kigali, the International Committee of the Red Cross will coordinate transportation of the food by road to people in need.

An upsurge in tribal fighting has sent thousands of peasant farmers fleeing southwards towards Kigali and across border into neighbouring Uganda.

WFP said the number of displaced people in the country has increased from 147,000 in mid-1992 to 600,000, raising fears of widespread starvation.

Meanwhile, WFP is making contingency plans to feed some 8,000 Rwandan refugees who have fled into Uganda in the past few weeks.

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