

Belgian ministers meet on Rwanda emergency

Stephen Nisbet

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BRUSSELS, April 8 (Reuter) - The Belgian government held emergency talks late on Thursday night about the possible evacuation of Belgian nationals from Rwanda after at least 11 Belgian U.N. peacekeepers were shot dead in an orgy of violence.

The meeting began before a U.N. spokesman in the Rwandan capital Kigali announced that the Belgian troops were killed after being disarmed by members of the Rwandan presidential guard in Rwanda's capital Kigali.

Arriving for the meeting, which was attended by top military officers, Defence Minister Leo Delcroix answered "that cannot be ruled out" when asked by state television BRT whether there could be an evacuation.

Belgium, the former colonial power in both countries, has about 1,500 civilian nationals in Rwanda and 1,200 in Burundi.

The killing of presidents Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi in a rocket at-

tack on their aircraft over Kigali on Wednesday sparked an orgy of bloodshed in Rwanda.

"Thirteen Belgians were sent last night to investigate the crash at the airport. Elements of the presidential guard stopped them and asked for them to hand over their arms," the U.N. spokesman in Kigali, Mukhtar Gueye, told Reuters.

"They cooperated and did so and were then detained. We have now recovered 11 bodies. Two are still unaccounted for. They were dead from bullet wounds. You can call it an execution."

The troops were part of the 2,500-strong, 20-nation U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda.

Delcroix said the situation in Rwanda was still confused and the problem at the moment was the airport, an apparent reference to Kigali.

Foreign Affairs Minister Willy Claes, interviewed by BRT on a visit to Romania, said an aircraft of the Belgian airline Sabena was on stand-

by in the Burundian capital Bujumbura for use in evacuations if the situation got worse.

There was also a C-130 transport plane available in Kenya, and fleets of cars could be called on to take people to safety by road.

Belgium expressed outrage at the deaths of the presidents.

Claes told Belgian news agency Belga he would appeal to the United Nations later on Thursday to strengthen its mandate in Rwanda "as a precautionary measure so that the situation does not become out of control in Rwanda".

The ministry said in a statement : "We learned with astonishment of the brutal attack against an aircraft over Kigali which cost the lives of the presidents of Burundi and Rwanda. We strongly condemn this loss which could seriously put into question the precarious balance in the two countries."

There are about 450 Belgian troops in Rwanda as part of a team of 2,500 U.N. peacekeepers overseeing the central African country's transition to democracy.

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