

Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi dead in Kigali

Evelyn Leopold

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UNITED NATIONS, April 6 (Reuter) - The presidents of both Rwanda and Burundi were killed in a plane crash and Rwanda's U.N. ambassador said the aircraft had been shot down.

A senior U.N. official, Under-Secretary-General Chinmaya Gharekhan, said the plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira crashed over Kigali airport and "both presidents lost their lives."

But he said he had no independent confirmation of an assassination attempt. Other U.N. officials said they had reports that shots were fired at Kigali airport amid heavy military activity there.

Rwanda's ambassador, Jean Damascene Bizimana, told reporters, "It was not an accident; it was an assassination.

"The presidential airplane has been subject to shooting. "The pre-

sidents were killed by the enemies of peace in Rwanda and Burundi."

He told Security Council members earlier that rockets had been fired at the plane as it was landing, Gharekhan reported.

Bizimana said the aircraft belonged to the president of Rwanda and held 12 to 14 people.

"I am very concerned not only for me but all the people of my country. It is a tragedy for many reasons. We are at the beginning of the peace process," he added.

The two presidents were returning from a regional meeting in the Tanzanian capital of Dar Es Salaam.

The full Security Council, of which Rwanda is a member, at a formal session, paid tribute to the two presidents by standing in a moment of silence.

Security Council President Colin Keating said he would like to express the council's "profound sorrow and

condolences at the tragic and sudden deaths today” of the two presidents.

He told the 15-member body that the “two leaders served their respective countries with great dedication and they lost their lives in pursuit of their efforts to restore peace to Burundi and Rwanda.”

The United Nations has a 2,500-member peacekeeping force in Rwanda, which is still recovering from a three-year civil war between the majority Hutu and the Tutsi ethnic groups.

Keating, who is New Zealand’s ambassador, told reporters earlier that the council hoped “calm” would prevail in both countries over the next few days.

He said the United Nations would have to review the situation of U.N. personnel immediately “to ensure their safety and that they are being deployed to the best effect.”

At the meeting both presidents attended in Dar Es Salaam earlier Wednesday, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda agreed to send their foreign ministers to Burundi to help rebuild confidence in the government.

The African leaders also called for

reforms to the Burundian army, dominated by the minority Tutsi and seen as largely responsible for clashes since October with the Hutu majority.

Ntaryamira said he was grateful for neighbouring countries sheltering 800,000 Burundi refugees from the tribal fighting since renegade troops killed Burundi’s first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, on October 21 last year in a failed coup.

The United Nations says 375,000 Burundians are registered as refugees in Zaire, Rwanda and Tanzania.

“Burundi is bleeding. I am aware it hurts your economies. Still, we need your help.” said Ntaryamira.

On Rwanda, the African leaders said they were concerned at delays since December in forming transitional institutions as agreed in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha last August.

The U.N. Security Council Tuesday renewed the mandate for peacekeeping forces for Rwanda for four months but threatened to pull them out unless the Arusha peace agreements were honoured.

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