

France considers evacuating nationals from Rwanda

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PARIS, April 8 (Reuter) - France is considering using troops stationed in the Central African Republic to evacuate its nationals from Rwanda, military sources said on Friday.

“We are studying the possibility of evacuating French nationals,” one official said. “We are considering using troops in the Central African Republic to lend help in Rwanda but to my knowledge no decision has been taken.”

There are about 600 French nationals in Rwanda, most in the capital Kigali.

Foreign ministry spokesman Richard Duque told reporters France was “extremely concerned” by the situation in Rwanda but the French community there was not “worried”.

“Our countrymen have been advised to stay at home,” he said. “All necessary measures have been taken to prepare for a possible evacuation if the situation requires.”

There had been no serious incidents involving French nationals, but two French humanitarian aid groups said they were evacuating foreign staff from Rwanda because of massacres and chaos.

Medecins du Monde (Doctors of the World) and Pharmaciens Sans Frontieres (Pharmacists Without Borders) said the decision was taken to protect the lives of their workers.

France has a total of about 8,600 soldiers in the Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Gabon, Ivory Coast and Senegal. About 1,000 are in the Central African Republic capital Bangui.

Military sources said on Thursday that France had put its troops in former African colonies on alert following the killing of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in a rocket attack on their plane.

Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe

Uwilingiyimana and at least 10 Belgian U.N. peacekeeping troops were killed in the ensuing violence sweeping the country.

Duque said several Rwandan government ministers and leading figures, as well as Belgian, Ghanaian and Bangladeshi U.N. soldiers, had died in the violence. The Foreign ministry declined to identify the victims.

A U.N. spokesman in Kigali said earlier members of the presidential guard had abducted Information Minister Faustin Rucogoza, Labour and Social Affairs Minister Landuard Ndasingwa and Agriculture Minister Frederic Nzamurambaho and their families.

France, which for several years had about 300 soldiers in Rwanda, withdrew its remaining contingent last December. They were replaced by U.N. troops. France still has a small number of military technical advisers in Rwanda and Burundi.

Belgium, the former colonial power, has put a unit of crack paratroops on alert for a possible evacuation of foreigners from Rwanda, government sources in Brussels said earlier.

Duque said Paris was in close contact with Belgium and French officials said Paris was likely to follow Belgium's lead.

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