

# U.S. to evacuate Americans from Rwanda

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WASHINGTON, April 8 (Reuter) - The United States, its ambassador's residence under attack, has ordered Americans to leave Rwanda and is making plans for an evacuation, deputy assistant secretary of state Prudence Bushnell said Friday.

"We issued an ordered departure, and what that means is that we are going to be looking at plans to take out the Americans, the official Americans and their dependents, and American citizens," she told a State Department news briefing.

Bushnell refused to go into detail, saying only "there are a number of plans in the works about evacuation." Talks are underway with other governments with citizens in Rwanda.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher cancelled a late afternoon session with reporters after a hastily called meeting was called at the Pentagon for him and senior officials to discuss Rwanda and evacuation options.

"The situation there is not getting any better," one administration official told Reuters.

Pentagon officials said the Defence Department was "standing by" and making contingency plans, including identifying planes in Europe to be used for an evacuation. But officials said a formal request had not yet come through.

Earlier at the State Department briefing, Bushnell acknowledged that at least for now departure via the Rwanda airport is off limits.

"I would not advise anybody to land aircraft at the airport at this time...I understand the Rwandan military is in the area of the airport. They are not on our radio net, so ...we do not have information about what is going on in that area," she said.

Bushnell said there are 255 Americans in Rwanda, which has deteriorated into chaos and renewed civil war after the presidents of Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi were killed Wednesday in a rocket attack on their plane.

There are no reports any Americans have been hurt, she said.

But as of the last report from Kigali, 200 Rwandan citizens were in the residence of U.S. Ambassador David Rawson seeking refuge. Outside the compound there was a firefight going on between the military and Rwandan rebels, she said.

U.S. officials were also closely watching the situation at a Seventh Day Adventist School in the Rwandan countryside where a "mob of Rwandan civilians"

entered the school compound and began looting, Bushnell said. At least 21 American teachers and dependents live on the compound.

Later in the day, a State Department spokesman said the Adventists had negotiated with the mob, which is “no longer menacing them.” The Adventists had taken “safe haven” in two houses in the compound, which is quite a distance from Kigali, the spokesman said.

In Minneapolis, President Clinton told reporters he had extended conversations with Christopher, Defence Secretary William Perry and National Security Adviser Anthony Lake on Rwanda.

“It is a very tense situation and I just want to assure the families of those who are there that we are doing everything we possibly can to be on top of the situation and take all the appropriate steps to try to ensure the safety of our citizens there,” Clinton said.

In Washington, Bushnell said there are no U.S. Marine guards, only five United Nations peacekeepers to defend the U.S. ambassador’s residence.

“It is responsibility of the host government to provide protection. The ambassador called the (Rwandan) minister of defence, who responded affirmatively that he was going to do what he could to provide the protection to that compound and to the ambassador,” she said.

But she admitted government troops have their hands full fighting the rebels and said the other option lies with the the United Nations, which is discussing expanding the mandate of the U.N. troops in Rwanda to provide protection.

“There is a very unstable situation on the ground that is unfolding very quickly,” she said, adding that Americans have been told through a warden call-out system to “stay home, stay low.”

Because of the precarious situation, including the fact that the airport is controlled by Rwandan military guards, it is unclear when Americans and other foreign nationals could be evacuated from the country.

“There is fighting and there is chaos. There is no date, there is no time. We’re looking to see how best we can do this,” Bushnell said.

The State Department is maintaining an open telephone line to the embassy in Kigali. Information is also coming from the ambassador, who is at his residence. He is in radio contact with the embassy because his telephone is not working.

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