

# 30 Red Cross staff dead in Rwanda bloodletting

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GENEVA, April 14 (Reuter) - At least 30 Rwandan Red Cross workers have been killed in the country's fighting and the figure could rise, the international IFRC Red Cross organisation said on Thursday.

"It is the largest ever single loss of Red Cross lives in the history of the Federation and there are fears the death toll will rise," said the the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which groups together 161 national societies worldwide.

"The workers were all killed as they helped families, friends and strangers while the wave of violence swept through the capital, Kigali," it added in a statement from the Geneva headquarters.

The central African state has been awash with ethnic bloodletting since the assassination of its president last week. Rebels from the minority Tutsi tribe have since captured large parts of the country and are threatening the capital.

Federation spokeswoman Bodine Williams told Reuters the dead included both full-time Red Cross staff and volunteers.

"We've verified all our records for 75 years and we've never seen as many Red Cross workers killed in an upheaval of this nature - not even close," she said.

The leadership of the Rwandan Red Cross was thought to be safe although the situation in the country had made it extremely difficult to establish the whereabouts of its staff.

The Federation has evacuated 13 of its 14 international staff in Rwanda, where it set up a major operation last October alongside the Rwandan Red Cross to help over 200,000 refugees from neighbouring Burundi. That operation has ground to a halt.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other aid organisations say that thousands of Burundis in refugee camps inside Rwanda have already decided to flee.

But Williams said that with Burundi itself still torn by ethnic conflict, many had no idea where to go.

"The problem for refugees is that they don't know where to run to. But we expect the are going to be big movements to neighbouring countries," she said.

She added that international aid agencies such as the Federation and the UNHCR had to decide where to base their operations in the region.

News of the deaths came after the Federation launched a 3.5 million Swiss franc (\$2.4 million) emergency appeal to help up to 50,000 refugees from Rwanda.  
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