

Government forces, rebels fight in Rwandan capital

Mseteka, Buchizya

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NAIROBI, April 15 (Reuter) - Rwandan rebels and government forces battled with artillery and mortars on Friday for control of their country's blood-soaked capital Kigali.

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) said fighting between Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels and government units was raging at key points of the city where thousands of people have died in an orgy of ethnic violence between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi tribes,

Former colonial power Belgium called on the United Nations to suspend its paralysed peacekeeping operation in the central African state, saying it had lost its point.

U.N. officials said that despite six days of fighting, sparked by the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana in a rocket attack on his plane last week, neither group seemed to be in control of the city.

Hundreds of rebel fighters have infiltrated the city but government troops, including men of the presidential guard, were still resisting fiercely, the U.N. officials said.

Fighting was continuing despite a U.N.-brokered agreement to allow a further 24 hours to evacuate trapped foreigners.

The agreement was meant to allow Belgian and French forces to avoid direct combat with either rebels or government army units on roads leading to the international airport.

It was not clear how many foreigners remained trapped in the country of eight million people.

Belgium said it was withdrawing its contingent of about 420 men from the U.N. team and said the 2,500-strong peacekeeping deployment should be suspended and leave Rwanda because of the "brutal rupture" in the peace and democracy process.

"That is why the government is in favour of the suspension of the U.N. mandate and the withdrawal of troops," the government said in a statement.

U.N. officials said it was impossible to keep the mission going without the well-equipped Belgians.

In Geneva, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said more than 20,000 people, many of them refugees from neighbouring Burundi, had fled

the current unrest in Rwanda.

UNHCR spokeswoman Sylvana Foa told reporters that 12,000 people had fled to Burundi, around 9,100 to Zaire, several hundred to Tanzania and around 100 to Uganda.

Of those that had fled to Burundi, 11,000 were Burundians who fled ethnic violence in their own country last year. There are around 275,000 Burundi refugees in camps in Rwanda.

Of the 9,100 who had fled to Zaire, 8,000 were Rwandans and 1,100 refugees from Burundi. Those who fled to Zaire and Tanzania were Rwandans.

Foa said a U.N. team had managed to get into Burundi refugee camps around Butare, near the Burundi border, where about 140,000 refugees were holed up.

The team had reported that the situation in the area was stable and had given the green light for cross-border aid convoys from Tanzania via northern Burundi to go to the camps.

Foa said there was about a week's supply of food in the camps, even with all the refugees in them only on half-rations.

She added that High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata had released \$5 million from an emergency fund to tide the operation over until donor governments responded to an appeal for funds.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has suspended operations in the country after gunmen pulled six wounded civilians from vehicles belonging to the local Rwandan Red Cross and killed them on the spot, ICRC officials said.

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