

Rwandans give foreigners 24 more hours - U.N.

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NAIROBI, April 15 (Reuter) - The United Nations has reached an agreement with Rwandan rebels and army units allowing a further 24 hours to evacuate trapped foreigners, the U.N. said on Friday.

Fighting between Rwanda Patriotic Front rebel and government units still raged in key points of the capital Kigali, UNAMIR, the U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda, said.

“This means Belgian and French forces avoid direct combat with either rebels or government army units on the routes leading to the international airport in Kigali,” it said in a statement received in Nairobi. “UNAMIR has to inform Rwandan combatants its evacuation itinerary.”

It was not known how many foreigners were still trapped in the maze of slaughter that has claimed thousands of lives in the overcrowded central African nation of eight million people.

The RPF had initially given UNAMIR and Western forces up to 2200 GMT on Thursday to leave Rwanda and said Belgian or other forces would be considered enemies after the deadline.

UNAMIR wants to relaunch a peace initiative similar to the Arusha agreement of August 1993 shattered when fighting erupted following the death last week of President Juvenal Habyarimana, killed in a rocket attack on his plane.

U.N. special representative Jacques-Roger Booh Booh, who is based in neighbouring Burundi, said he was holding consultations with the Security Council to define a new mandate for the U.N. force after the collapse of a ceasefire it was meant to police under the Arusha accords.

He said he was concerned about the lives of 12,000 Rwandans sheltering at a hospital under the care of UNAMIR's special medical units but with no food, water, or medical facilities.

Booh Booh said 933 other Rwandan civilian were guarded by Bangladeshi soldiers at Kigali's soccer stadium.

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