

# Rebel reinforcements push on Kigali despite talks

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NAIROBI, April 22 (Reuter) - Rebel reinforcements advanced on government forces in the beleaguered Rwandan capital of Kigali after both sides agreed to peace talks and the U.N. voted to withdraw all but a few hundred of its peacekeepers.

United Nations officials in Kigali said Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) reinforcements were heading for the capital after they were reported to have captured the town of Rwamagana, about 25 miles (40 km) to the east.

The officials, speaking by telephone, said they had fresh reports of massacres of civilians near the southern towns of Butare, Gityrama and Gikondoro but had no figures for the dead.

Hundreds of thousands of people are feared to have been slaughtered since the presidents of Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi were killed when their plane was shot down near Kigali on April 6.

In New York, the U.N. Security Council interrupted a marathon debate on Bosnia to adopt a resolution reducing the Rwanda force, once numbering 2,500, to a bare minimum of 270 military and civilian personnel.

The resolution would leave the force commander, Canadian General Romeo Dallaire, and his staff in Kigali as an intermediary between the warring Hutu and Tutsi groups and to assist relief operations.

He would be protected by an infantry company of about 150 soldiers as well as military observers. Remaining also would be the chief U.N. civilian representative, Jacques-Roger Booh Booh of Cameroon, who would attempt to restart peace talks.

The council pledged to consider promptly any recommendations to increase the force level, depending on developments.

But Rwanda's ambassador, Jean Damascene Bizimana, told the council the international community had been more concerned with the evacuation of foreigners than the "anguish of the Rwandan people and their need for order and aid".

Nigeria's deputy ambassador, Isaac Ayewah, said he voted for the resolution with reluctance because he understood that additional forces could not be raised quickly.

But he asked whether "we as a community have really exerted our best efforts to assist the people of Rwanda" or "whether the United Nations will turn its back on Rwanda".

Aid agencies have said a total U.N. withdrawal from Rwanda would put at risk thousands of displaced people who rely on the U.N. presence to deter roaming gunmen and U.N. officers are worried about the effectiveness of such a small force.

“With that number (270), we simply cannot accompany convoys, monitor any ceasefire or investigate problems as well as take over control of the airport, as is planned,” a U.N. officer said.

“A force of 270 would also have a lot of manpower problems if it was required to stay near places where the refugees are.”

But a senior U.N. official in Kigali said he had no evidence to support a British Broadcasting Corporation report that thousands of displaced people in the city’s main stadium were threatening to commit suicide if all U.N. forces pulled out.

“The people at stadium have expressed their great concern at the news that the United Nations was leaving but none of them have threatened suicide,” said UNAMIR’s executive director, Abdul Kabia.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which said it had rarely seen a human tragedy on the scale of the massacres, urged U.N. peacekeepers to stay in the country, now bordering on famine.

In neighbouring Burundi, state-radio said President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya held a meeting of ministers and representatives of the security forces and local government to find a lasting solution to sporadic violence in the past week.

The radio said fighting was continuing in the capital of Bujumbura. Diplomats fear Burundi, which like Rwanda has a long history of bloodshed between its Hutu majority and Tutsi minority, may soon explode.

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