Belgian peace-keepers will leave Rwanda, says foreign minister

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BRUSSELS, April 14 (AFP) - Belgium's 400-strong contingent in the United Nations mission in Rwanda will not remain there "under any circumstances", Belgian Foreign Minister Willy Claes said here Thursday.

Speaking at a press conference, he said the decision to pull out the Belgian peacekeepers stood no matter what the UN Security Council decided to do later Thursday with its mission in the war-ravaged country.

Claes told a press conference: "We have decided to withdraw the Belgian troops from the United Nations contingent. Their peacekeeping mission no longer makes sense."

Ten Belgian members of the UN Assistance Mission to Belgium were slaughtered by the Rwandan presidential guard in Kigali on Thursday last week after trying unsuccessfully to stop the murder of Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingyamana.

Claes said: "We believe that the Security Council would show great wisdom if it decided (at a meeting later Thursday) to suspend its peacekeeping mission."

Diplomats in New York said Belgium had asked UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali on Tuesday to endorse the pull-out of the Belgian peacekeepers because they had become a burden on the UN Assistance Force in Rwanda.

Belgian troops and civilians became the victims of an anti-Belgian hate campaign during the last week of carnage in Rwanda, because of Belgium's policy of neutrality.

Belgium was accused by members of the interim government and its supporters of supporting the rebel Rwandan Patriotioc Front.

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