

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 16/002/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 025
5 February 2003

Burundi: Deployment of ceasefire monitors - a critical time

As the African Union (AU) prepares to send an international force to Burundi to monitor implementation of the cease-fire agreement signed in December 2002 between the Government of Burundi and the *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie - Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD-FDD), Amnesty International today called on signatories to the cease-fire agreement to take immediate steps to prevent human rights abuses by their forces, in particular the killing of unarmed civilians.

"The cease-fire agreement will mean virtually nothing to ordinary Burundians if the pattern of human rights abuses persists or even escalates," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International believes that it essential for the mandate of the AU force to explicitly include human rights protection and prevention. The force must be given adequate resources, appropriate training and the political support to exercise this mandate, including comprehensive public reporting on human rights abuses.

Thirty-five observers are due imminently in Burundi to be followed by a larger monitoring force. The deployment of the international observation force is a key component of the cease-fire agreement. It is a step eagerly awaited by some; feared, or resisted by others -- and not least because of the immediacy it gives to the ultra sensitive question of reform of the government armed forces.

Such emotions can only be heightened by ongoing conflict and human rights abuses, creating an environment where the continued escalation of the human rights crisis is easily foreseeable.

Following an initial lull in fighting between the government armed forces and CNDD-FDD in December 2002, hostilities resumed in various parts of the country, particularly the central area around Gitega and the south eastern border area around Ruyigi. The fighting has brought new reports of reprisal killings of unarmed civilians by the armed forces, unlawful killings and looting by the CNDD-FDD, and heightened an already critical humanitarian situation. Tens of thousands of people in these areas are reported to be recently displaced and to be without access to humanitarian aid.

Between 20 and 30 unarmed civilians were extrajudicially executed by members of the government armed forces in Muvumu sector, Gisuru commune on 20 January. The killings appear to have been in reprisal for the killing of 10 soldiers in an ambush, carried out by the CNDD-FDD, two days earlier. Other such killings by government soldiers are reported to have taken place recently including those of seven civilians in Kamenge district, Bujumbura on 2 February, shot indiscriminately in response to an ambush on a military vehicle close to Kamenge.

Several people, including at least one local government official (*chef de secteur*) have been

deliberately and unlawfully killed by CNDD-FDD combatants in the same period. Several others are reported to have been abducted, and scores of homes have been looted.

The other main armed political group, PALIPEHUTU-FNL, led by Agathon Rwasa, which has not signed a cease-fire agreement, remains active around the capital, regularly attacking and looting outlying districts. It commits numerous human rights abuses including the unlawful killing of local government officials and civilians deemed to have collaborated in some way with government or military personnel in the area in which it operates.

Amnesty International is appealing to:

The AU and others involved in current negotiations on Burundi to ensure that the cease-fire monitoring force has the mandate and the resources to protect human rights and prevent human rights abuses, as well as to report publicly on any such abuses which occur;

The AU force and parties to the cease-fire agreement to cooperate in investigating abuses and ensure that those suspected to be responsible are brought to justice;

The Government and Military Commanders of Burundi to make it clear that extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings of unarmed civilians by the security forces will not be tolerated. This should be done not only by public statements to that effect but also by carrying out thorough and independent investigations into reports of all such killings, making public the results of these investigations and ensuring that individuals suspected of responsibility for ordering or carrying out all such killings are immediately suspended from their duties and brought to justice;

The leaders of the CNDD-FDD and PALIPEHUTU-FNL to issue immediate public instructions to their combatants to end killings of civilians, and the summary executions of captured soldiers;

All parties to ensure that humanitarian and human rights organizations are not hindered in their work and to ensure that the civilian population is not only protected from human rights abuses in areas of conflict, but that they are allowed access to humanitarian aid.

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