

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 02/27/97

EXTRA 124/97

Fear of refoulement / Fear for safety

9 September 1997

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO / RWANDA** Thousands of Rwandese and Burundi refugees

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Following the forcible expulsion of around 775 Rwandese and Burundi refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Rwanda on 5 September 1997, Amnesty International is concerned that thousands more may face imminent expulsion or other threats to their safety.

The DRC authorities have repeatedly threatened to forcibly repatriate any refugees remaining in the DRC by 15 September 1997. Soldiers have been deployed where refugees have gathered in various parts of the country and there are fears that many more refugees could yet be forced back to Rwanda or Burundi.

The refugees were expelled from DRC after soldiers surrounded a transit centre at Kisangani inhabited by around 450 Rwandese and 345 Burundi refugees. According to some sources the soldiers were Rwandese. The soldiers prevented humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), from entering the transit centre. They also cordoned off Kisangani airport. On 5 September it was reported that at least 524 Rwandese and Burundian refugees, including many children, had arrived in the Rwandese capital Kigali after being made to board three aeroplanes in Kisangani. The Rwandese authorities have made clear their intention to return the Burundi refugees to Burundi, and at least 135 of the refugees are reported to have already been returned.

It is not yet clear what has happened to the remaining refugees at the transit centre in Kisangani. In August soldiers are reported to have entered the transit centre on several occasions and led away an unknown number of refugees. The refugees did not return and Amnesty International fears they may have been killed.

Amnesty International is concerned that in addition to the risk of human rights abuses they may face on return to Rwanda or Burundi, the refugees are at risk of extrajudicial execution and other human rights abuses in DRC.

Hundreds of Rwandese and Burundi refugees south of Kisangani were reportedly massacred by members of the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL), Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, and their allies during April and May 1997. Thousands of other Rwandese and Burundi refugees are reported to have been massacred in camps and forests since October 1996 and hundreds of thousands remain unaccounted for.

The deadline of 15 September could be linked to the presence of a UN human rights team currently in the DRC to investigate reports of massacres of refugees. It may be an attempt to remove witnesses to the massacres who could be interviewed by the investigators.

See EXTRA 123/97 (AFR 02/26/97, 9 September 1997) for further information.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Returning Rwandese and Burundian refugees are at risk of grave human rights abuses in their home country. Many of the Rwandese refugees may be returning to areas in the northwest of Rwanda where thousands of civilians have been

killed or "disappeared" in recent months. These areas are largely inaccessible to humanitarian agencies due to widespread violence, and it is virtually impossible to monitor the safety of returnees. Burundian refugees also risk being deliberately and arbitrarily killed by Burundi government forces or armed opposition groups as widespread insecurity persists in many parts of Burundi.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French/English or your own language:**

to the DRC authorities:

- expressing deep concern at the forcible expulsion of at least 700 Rwandese and Burundi refugees from DRC on 5 September 1997 and urging that no further forcible expulsions take place;
- seeking assurances that the refugees will be allowed to remain in DRC or a third country if they request it and will not be returned to Rwanda or Burundi where their lives may be at risk;
- expressing deep concern for the safety of Rwandese and Burundi refugees remaining in DRC, and seeking assurances the refugees will be protected from human rights abuses in DRC

to the Rwandese authorities:

- calling on the Rwandese authorities to ensure the safety of refugees already returned or expelled to Rwanda and to refrain from any further *refoulement* of Burundi refugees to Burundi.

**APPEALS TO:**

Head of State

Son Excellence

Laurent-Désiré KABILA

Président de la République

Présidence de la République

Kinshasa-Ngaliema

Democratic Republic of Congo

**Telegrams: President Kabila, Kinshasa, DR Congo**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République/Dear President of the Republic**

Commandant Anselme Masasu NINDAGA

Chef d'Etat-Major de l'AFDL

Ministère de la Défense

BP 4734

Kinshasa-Gombe

Democratic Republic of Congo

**Telegrams: Commandant Nindaga, Ministère Defense, Kinshasa, DR Congo**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Commandant**

Vice-President and Minister of Defence

Général-Major Paul KAGAME

Vice-Président de la République et Ministre de la Défense

Présidence de la République

BP 23, KIGALI, Rwanda

**Fax: +250 72431 / 76969**

**Telegrams: Vice-President, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Vice-Président / Dear Vice-President**

**COPIES TO:**

M. Bizima KARAHA  
Ministre des Affaires étrangères  
Ministère des Affaires étrangères  
BP 7100  
Kinshasa-Gombe  
Democratic Republic of Congo

and to diplomatic representatives of DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO and RWANDA  
accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 October 1997.