

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 156/97

Refoulement / Fear of refoulement /  
Fear for safety

14 November 1997

**BURUNDI/DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO Over 1,000 Burundi and Rwandese refugees  
in the Rusizi region of eastern DRC**

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Since 9 November 1997 at least 1,043 Burundi and Rwandese refugees have been forcibly expelled from eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Burundi in a military operation involving both Congolese and Burundi soldiers. Many other refugees are now fleeing to Burundi and others are seeking the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to repatriate them. Amnesty International is concerned that thousands more may face imminent expulsion or other threats to their safety, and that, given the pattern of grave human rights violations in Burundi, their safety is not guaranteed.

Amnesty International is investigating reports that of 63 Burundi refugees arrested in Uvira, DRC, 38 have "disappeared". It is also investigating reports of extrajudicial executions of unarmed civilians by Burundi soldiers during the operation in DRC.

Seven trucks of Burundi soldiers reportedly crossed over into Kihanga, DRC, on 7 November and, with local Congolese authorities and members of the security forces, began to systematically search out Burundi and Rwandese refugees. Between 7 and 13 November at least seven villages and towns were searched, including the town of Uvira on 9 and 10 November. The refugees, who had been living in eastern DRC for many years - some since 1972, others since the early to mid-1980s - were integrated into the population and had to be indicated to the Burundi soldiers by the local authorities.

According to reports, the refugees were picked up wherever they were found and were not allowed to return to their homes to collect their belongings or see members of their families. Many were separated from their families. Those who tried to resist were beaten. The refugees were apparently accused of belonging to the DRC armed group, the *Mayi Mayi*, or the Rwandese *interahamwe* militia, and told they had to leave. The refugees were expelled to Burundi's northern province of Cibitoke where Burundi soldiers were waiting for them.

Although Amnesty International has so far not received reports of ill-treatment or arbitrary arrest of the refugees on their return, it is concerned for their safety and well-being. The majority of the refugees are believed to be from Cibitoke province where there is a high degree of armed conflict between the Burundi government forces and armed opposition groups, and killings of unarmed civilians. Some of the returned refugees may be forced into regroupment camps. Refugees, who were not from Cibitoke province, and over 60 Rwandese refugees, are reported to have been transferred to Gatumba transit camp, Rural Bujumbura province. It is not clear if the Rwandese refugees will be allowed to stay in Burundi.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Returning Burundi refugees are in danger of grave human rights abuses in their home country. They risk being deliberately and arbitrarily killed by Burundi government forces or armed opposition groups as widespread insecurity persists in many parts of Burundi, including Cibitoke province which is often inaccessible to humanitarian agencies due to widespread violence, and it is virtually impossible to monitor the safety of returnees. Hundreds of Burundi refugees have been forcibly expelled

from DRC in late 1996 and 1997; many were subsequently extrajudicially executed soon after their return to Burundi.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/express/airmail letters, in French or your own language, to the DRC authorities;**

**In telegrams:**

- expressing deep concern at the forcible expulsion of at least 1,043 Burundi and Rwandese refugees from DRC since 9 November 1997 and calling for the *refoulements* to be stopped;

- 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;

**and in letters, additionally:**

- calling for an end to the collusion of DRC authorities in allowing Burundi soldiers into the DRC and helping to identify the refugees before forcibly repatriating them;

- 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;

- calling for an independent investigation into the reports of ill-treatment, "disappearance", and extrajudicial execution of refugees, and if found to be true, for those responsible to be brought to justice.

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**

Minister of Interior

M. Mwenze KONGOLO  
Ministre de l'Intérieur  
Hôtel du Conseil exécutif  
Kinshasa-Gombe, Democratic Republic of Congo

**Telegrams: Ministre Intérieur, Kinshasa, DR Congo**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister**

**To the Burundi authorities (please note still no mail to Burundi):**

**In telegrams:**

- calling on the Burundi authorities to ensure the safety of refugees already returned to Burundi and to allow international humanitarian and intergovernmental organizations access to them;

- expressing concern at the forcible expulsion of at least 1043 Burundi and Rwandese and Burundi refugees from DRC with the assistance of the Burundi security forces and calling on the authorities to stop the expulsions now;

**and in faxes, additionally:**

- expressing concern at reports of ill-treatment of refugees and at allegations of killings of the refugees in DRC;

- seeking assurances that Rwandese refugees expelled during the operation to Burundi, will be allowed to remain, should they wish, in Burundi in safety or that assistance will be provided to allow them to seek asylum in a safe country.

**It can be difficult to obtain a fax tone to Burundi, but these numbers believed to function intermittently.**

President

Major Pierre Buyoya, Président de la

République

**Faxes: +257 22 7490**

**Telegrams: Major Buyoya, Bujumbura, Burundi**

**Salutation: Dear President**

Minister of Defence

Lieutenant-Col. Firmin SINZOYIHEBA

Ministre de la Défense Nationale

**Faxes: +257 22 56 86**

**Telegrams: Ministre Defense, Bujumbura, Burundi**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre**

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of BURUNDI / DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO  
accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your  
section office, if sending appeals after 15 December 1997.