

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 119/94 Unrestrained use of lethal force / fear of extrajudicial executions

24 March 1994

BURUNDI Estimates of hundreds of civilians killed in the capital, Bujumbura

Amnesty International is extremely concerned that the Burundi army, already responsible for thousands of extrajudicial executions since October 1993, is using unrestrained lethal force in an army operation being carried out in Bujumbura and that it may be extrajudicially executing hundreds of unarmed civilians with firearms, including mortars, rifles, handguns and bayonets.

Sources in Burundi fear that hundreds of civilians, many of them unarmed, may have been killed during fighting between the army and armed civilians in Bujumbura's northern districts of Kamenge, Cibitoke and Kinama, which are mostly populated by members of the Hutu ethnic group. Independent witnesses have counted around 100 bodies including those of women, children and small babies amongst the dead carried out of the area.

The latest round of killings began on 21 March 1994, when the security forces, dominated by members of the Tutsi ethnic group, entered the area under a recently formed security council's orders to end violence between Hutu and Tutsi civilians by disarming certain individual local residents. Amnesty International is dismayed by this decision to send the army into a district where more than 200 unarmed civilians had been extrajudicially executed by the security forces only two weeks earlier (see UA 94/94, AFR 16/06/94, 8 March and background below).

It is now apparent that the army has blocked off the entire area and there are reports of heavy firing between armed civilians and the army. The army has reportedly ignored several pull-out orders from the security council. Several government ministers and the President fled their homes on the night of 22 March following rumours that there was to be a coup attempt after a cabinet meeting had decided to replace certain top security officials for failing to bring an end to the insecurity. Fighting in the area continued after President Cyprien Ntaryarimira made an appeal to the nation on 23 March to end the fighting and for the army to return to barracks. The President has since returned to his residence.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

More than 200 men, women and children were killed in Kamenge district on 6 March 1994 during a night time raid in which members of the army were alleged to have used bayonets to kill unarmed civilians. Many of the bodies were transported in army trucks and dumped in local rivers. Both the army and the gendarmerie have denied responsibility for this incident.

The latest killings are a continuation of the violence and instability which racked Burundi when the army executed President Melchior Ndadaye and other senior government and National Assembly official during a coup attempt on 21 October 1993. Between October and December 1993, up to 100,000 civilians were killed. Many Hutu civilians were executed extrajudicially by the security forces, some of them in reprisal for the killing of Tutsi by Hutu civilians. A commission of inquiry set up by the government in December has failed to begin investigations into the coup attempt and the killings.

Since late 1993 there have been sporadic killings, mainly in Bujumbura. Many of the victims appear to be Hutu killed by Tutsi civilians aided or protected by members of the security forces. More than 50 civilians were killed at the end of January and early February when opposition leaders from the Tutsi ethnic group called on supporters to take action to force the government to reverse its decision to dissolve the Constitutional Court. Their supporters set up barricades and used violence to stop members of the public from going to work. The violence later degenerated when Tutsi attacked and killed members of the Hutu ethnic group, from which the government draws most of its support.

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

- Expressing deep concern at the killings, which have included unarmed civilians such as women and children, taking place in the Bujumbura's northern districts of Kamenge, Cibitoke and Kinama, and appealing to all parties to do all in their power to halt the fighting;
- Expressing concern that the military have violated pull-out orders issued by the President on 23 March and asking them cease firing on unarmed people at once;
- Expressing concern that both the government and the military authorities have taken virtually no measures to punish perpetrators of human rights violations, thus allowing them and others to continue violating human rights in the knowledge they can act with impunity;
- Urging the authorities to set up an independent and impartial investigation to establish the exact causes of these killings with a view to identifying and bringing the perpetrators to justice;
- Expressing dismay over the government's decision to give the army orders to enter a district, where over 200 unarmed civilians had been extrajudicially executed by members of the security forces just over two weeks earlier.

APPEALS TO

1) President:

Son Excellence

le Président Cyprien NTARYAMIRA

Président de la République

Présidence de la République

BP 1870, Bujumbura, République du Burundi

Telegrams: President Ntaryamira

Telexes: 5036 PRESIBU BDI

Faxes: 257 22 6424

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République/Dear President

2) Minister of Defence:

Col. Gédéon FYIROKO

Ministre de la Défense Nationale

Ministère de la Défense

BP 1870, Bujumbura

République du Burundi

Telegrams: Ministre Fyikoro

Faxes: 257 22 21 48

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

3) Army Chief of Staff:

Lt-Col Jean BIKOMAGU

Chef de l'Etat-major général des Forces armées

Etat-major général des Forces armées
Ministère de la Défense nationale
Bujumbura, République du Burundi

Telegrams: CEMG Bikomagu

Faxes: 257 22 21 48

Salutation: Monsieur le Chef d'Etat-major/ Dear Chief of Staff

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Minister of Interior and Public Security

Monsieur Léonard NYANGOMA

Ministre d'Etat chargé de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité publique

Ministère de l'Intérieur

Bujumbura, République du Burundi

and to diplomatic representatives of Burundi accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 May 1994.