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## **Burundi: Government and armed opposition forces must protect civilian life.**

*Amnesty International today welcomed the efforts made so far by the Burundian military and the armed opposition to safeguard civilian life during recent fighting in Bujumbura, which enabled most civilians to flee the immediate areas of conflict.*

*However, Amnesty International is concerned that tens of thousands of civilians displaced by the violence are without basic humanitarian assistance. "We call on Burundi's military and civilian authorities to do their utmost to ensure that the necessary humanitarian aid is now provided."*

*The organization urged both the Burundian military and the armed opposition Forces nationales de libération (FNL), National Liberation Forces, to continue to protect civilian life. Both forces have previously committed gross human rights abuses against civilians, Amnesty said.*

*The situation in Bujumbura remains extremely tense. The government has called on the population to remain vigilant and to assist in its "self-defence". "The authorities must ensure that such calls do not lead to further indiscriminate violence against civilians," Amnesty International added.*

*Amnesty International also drew attention to continued violence in central and southern Burundi, and called on another armed opposition group, the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie - Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD), National Council for the Defence of Democracy - Forces for the Defence of Democracy, to respect international humanitarian law fully and to stop attacking civilians.*

*“Amnesty International continues to receive reports of abuses against civilians by the CNDD-FDD, in particular of rape and killings. If further abuses are to be prevented, the CNDD-FDD leadership must publicly condemn such abuses and hold its combatants accountable.”*

### **Background**

*Amnesty International's appeal was made as government forces continued in their efforts to repulse members of the mainly Hutu armed opposition group, the FNL, from the city. The FNL launched a sustained assault on Bujumbura on 24 February, and has since occupied parts of northern Bujumbura, including the district of Kinama, for several days.*

*The fighting has left scores dead, including civilians, and around 30,000 people are reported to have been displaced. Most have sought refuge within the city while a further 10,000 have fled outside the capital, some to areas where they are still in danger from the fighting and are cut off from any humanitarian aid. Those inside Bujumbura have reportedly so far received only meagre amounts of humanitarian assistance.*

*Counter-insurgency operations by the Tutsi-dominated security forces have in the past been marked by brutal reprisal killings or ill-treatment of unarmed Hutu civilians, who may be arbitrarily suspected by the military of having collaborated with the armed opposition. The FNL has also been responsible for massacres and other unlawful killings of civilians, both Tutsi and Hutu, and the destruction of their means of livelihood. It has openly threatened violence against civilians.*

*The FNL attack is the most serious and prolonged on Bujumbura in five years. The FNL maintains positions in the hills around the city, but has usually confined itself to hit-and-run attacks on Bujumbura. Kossan Kabura, the leader of the FNL, was deposed on 23 February, the day before the FNL attack. He had apparently entered into negotiations with the government, unsanctioned by other senior figures within the FNL. He was replaced by Rwaso Agathon. The FNL incursion into the city also coincided with negotiations on the composition of the transitional government, which should come into force as part of the implementation of the peace agreement.*

Although a peace agreement between the Burundian government, political parties and three armed opposition groups was signed in August 2000, further progress towards peace has been delayed by differences, in particular over who should lead a transitional government, and by the continuing fighting. The FNL and the CNDD-FDD were not involved in the peace negotiations and no cease-fire between these armed opposition groups and the Burundian government has been agreed.

Heavy fighting continues in southern Burundi between government forces and the CNDD-FDD, which has recently intensified its activities. The CNDD-FDD has itself been responsible for grave human rights abuses. It is particularly active in the southern and eastern provinces bordering Tanzania.

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