

EXTRA 179/96 Extrajudicial executions / Fear for safety 14 November 1996**BURUNDI** Burundi nationals returning from Zaire

Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the safety of Burundi nationals returning from Zaire in light of recent reports of mass extrajudicial executions of such returnees by the Burundi security forces. The Zairian authorities have stated that "all refugees from Burundi" must leave Zaire, and in addition armed groups have been forcibly returning Burundi nationals into Burundi (see below). In the absence of any effective safeguards to protect them, all returnees are at risk of extrajudicial execution, "disappearance", arbitrary arrest and torture in Burundi.

On or around 10 November 1996, at least 46 Burundi nationals who recently returned from Zaire are reported to have been shot and bayoneted to death by the security forces in the Bwiza district of the capital, Bujumbura.

Some 40 returnees are reported to have been extrajudicially executed by members of the Burundi security forces on or around 27 October at the border post, before the returnees reached Gatumba transit camp, Rural Bujumbura Province.

The authorities denied humanitarian agencies and United Nations human rights monitors access to the area.

On 22 October, as many as 400 returnees from Zaire were reportedly gathered by members of the Burundi security forces at Murambi Seventh Day Adventist Church, Citiboke Province. Adult males were reportedly separated from the rest and extrajudicially executed.

After passing through border transit camps, returnees risk being taken to the zones where they were formerly resident, and from where all members of their ethnic group have been forced to leave, making them particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Burundi has been in a state of civil war since the coup attempt of 21 October 1993. Since then, more than 150,000 people have been killed by security forces or armed groups from both Tutsi and Hutu communities. Since the coup in July 1996 which returned Major Pierre Buyoya to power, the conflict has continued and human rights violations by the government security forces and Tutsi and Hutu armed groups have continued. The United Nations have reported that about 10,000 people have been killed in politically motivated violence since July 1996.

The on-going war in eastern Zaire and attacks on Hutu refugees by the Tutsi-led *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL), Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, an armed group in Zaire, have forced at least 6,000 Hutu refugees to return to Burundi. Hundreds of these are reported to have been extrajudicially executed. In Zaire, the towns of Uvira and Bukavu in South-Kivu, as well as Goma in North-Kivu are now under the control of the AFDL. The borders with neighbouring Rwanda and Burundi are officially closed and information about human rights abuses in the two regions is currently difficult to obtain or confirm. The AFDL are reported to be behind attacks on refugee camps in North and South Kivu regions and on Lemera hospital in South-Kivu, where dozens of civilians were deliberately and arbitrarily killed.

Amnesty International has received reports that members of the AFDL have arrested and forcibly returned Burundi refugees from eastern Zaire, handing them over to members of the Burundi security forces. Other reports suggest that some Burundi refugees may have been killed or "disappeared" by members of Zairian armed groups as they tried to cross the border.

Please also see EXTRA 172/96 (AFR 16/30/96, 7 November 1996) on the "disappearance" of Melchior Bigirimana after his return to Burundi.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams or faxes (there is currently no mail to Burundi) in French or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to take immediate measures to protect returnees and other unarmed civilians from human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", arbitrary arrests and torture;
- expressing deep concern at reports that at least 46 returnees have been extrajudicially executed since 10 November 1996 in Bujumbura, and at other reports of "disappearance" or extrajudicial execution of returnees;
- urging that these reports be urgently investigated by a team which should include United Nations human rights monitors and representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bujumbura;
- calling for anyone found responsible for these human rights violations to be brought to justice in accordance with international standards of fairness.

APPEALS TO:

President

Major Pierre Buyoya
Président de la République
Présidence de la République

Fax: +257 22 7490

Telegrams: Major Buyoya, President, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Président/Dear President

Minister of Interior

Lieutenant-Colonel Epitace BAYAKANAKANDI
Ministre de l'Intérieur
Ministère de l'Intérieur, Bujumbura, Burundi

Fax: + 257 222148 / 213055

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Intérieur, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Lieutenant Colonel Firmin Sinzoyiheba
Ministre de la Défense nationale
Ministère de la Défense nationale

Fax : + 257 213055

Telegrams: Ministre de la Défense, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

Gervais Rubashamiheto
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des sceaux
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Telegrams: Ministre Rubashamiheto, Bujumbura, Burundi
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

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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 15 December 1996.