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PLEASE NOTE: The enclosed item is the news release for the launch of Burundi Week, embargoed for 17 May.

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EMBARGOED FOR 1100 hrs GMT TUESDAY 17 MAY 1994

BURUNDI: TIME TO ACT TO END A CYCLE OF MASS MURDER

Zabulon Nkuzimana beat the odds. He survived a wave of massacres that killed up to 100,000 people in Burundi in late 1993, then another round of killings last March that left hundreds more dead.

Nkuzimana was among some 50 members of the majority Hutu ethnic group arrested on 6 March 1994 by Burundi government soldiers, most of whom come from the minority Tutsi ethnic group. After rounding up these people in a suburb of Burundi's capital, the soldiers opened fire. Shot in the shoulder, the 18-year-old Nkuzimana collapsed to the ground, where dead bodies fell on him.

"Zabulon Nkuzimana may have escaped death that time, and yet another massacre that began on 21 March in the capital, but will he be that lucky next time?" Amnesty International said as it launched a special campaign today to draw international attention to the cycle of mass murder that is continuing in Burundi.

"The almost incomprehensible slaughter in Rwanda of the past four months followed a long period of inaction by the international community, which might have prevented the killings," the human rights group said. "Similar carnage has sporadically continued in Burundi since last October, without the world paying any attention, and the violence may grow to match what we have seen in Rwanda."

In launching its special campaign, the organization urges the international community to assist Burundi authorities to create a human rights monitoring presence on the ground; set up an investigation into recent political violence; and implement past recommendations by the United Nations and Amnesty International to prevent future massacres. Amnesty International is also urging countries with links to the Burundi armed forces to press for the transformation of the army from a partisan killing machine into an impartial protector of all Burundi's citizens.

"The decades of bloodshed in Burundi, and now Rwanda, are often presented as the result of ethnic struggle," Amnesty International said. "The reality is that the killings keep erupting because those responsible on both sides are not brought to justice and that international condemnation is not followed up with action."

The 6 April attack that killed the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in an air crash precipitated mass killings in Rwanda, while the situation in Burundi remains precarious. The Burundi military is largely outside government control. Rumours of an impending coup still circulate after an unsuccessful coup attempt in late April.

As in neighbouring Rwanda, where an estimated 200,000 people are believed to have been killed and more than 300,000 have fled the country since 7 April 1994, Burundi is fraught with long-standing tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. Periodic mass killings have occurred in Burundi in 1965, 1969, 1972, 1988 and 1991, in addition to the recent violence.

In their struggle for control of state institutions and the privileges that accrue from them, Hutu and Tutsi elites repeatedly trigger off, incite, encourage, or condone violence between the two predominantly rural populations. Then, no one is held accountable.

The latest report of killings occurred in early May, when 17 people were killed in the Kamenge suburb of the Burundi's capital of Bujumbura. In that same suburb, the Tutsi-dominated security forces entered to disarm certain individual Hutu civilians. The army cordoned off the entire area and began widespread, deliberate and arbitrary killings of unarmed civilians, simply because they were of the Hutu ethnic group. Hundreds of defenceless people died.

As in Rwanda, Burundi's soldiers have rarely taken prisoners. They have deliberately ignored the most basic tenet of humanitarian law -- that in no circumstances may prisoners or non-combatants be killed.

"The cycle of mass murder cannot be allowed to continue," Amnesty International said. "It is time for international action."

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INDONESIA/EAST TIMOR: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS INTENT TO ESTABLISH DIALOGUE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Amnesty International today wrote to Ali Alatas, Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, welcoming his radio announcement on 30 April that the Indonesian Government wished to establish a dialogue with the organization and to permit human rights organizations to visit East Timor.

The organization said that if the government's stated readiness to permit international organizations to visit East Timor is to be borne out in practice, it should facilitate such a visit by Amnesty International in the near future.

The Amnesty International has made numerous efforts over the years to have direct discussions with the Government of Indonesia and to obtain direct access to both Indonesia and East Timor to investigate its serious and long-standing human rights concerns there. Up to now Amnesty International has been disappointed by the Indonesian Government's negative response to these efforts.

In its letter the organization proposed that an Amnesty International delegation should visit Indonesia and East Timor within the next two months in order to conduct human rights research without restriction. During its visit, the organization should also clarify the nature and methods of its work for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide to the Indonesian Government.

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