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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS FOR MORE HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVERS IN RWANDA

An Amnesty International research team just returned from Rwanda said today that the international community must urgently increase its human rights monitoring presence and implement other measures to build trust in the divided country and restore the rule of law.

"Many villages in Rwanda are deserted, either because people living there were killed or had fled," Amnesty International said. "The rumours of human rights violations are still taking place is creating a climate of fear that can only be dispelled if the truth is made known."

Such reassurances are critical at this time: an estimated two million people fled the country out of fear of reprisals and arbitrary arrests. Rumours of large-scale reprisals are fuelling tensions and could result in further fear or instability. Tens of thousands of displaced Rwandese fear attacks by militia and other supporters of the former government.

The three Amnesty International representatives, visiting Rwanda from 4 to 13 August, investigated allegations of human rights violations committed during past and present governments. They met with top officials of the new government, including the President, Vice-President and Minister of Justice as well as local human rights groups, foreign non-governmental organizations, United Nations personnel and the survivors of massacres.

Continuing rumours of mass killings, torture and arrest are rife in Rwanda, but Amnesty International's researchers found that most witnesses had fled the area or were too scared to speak. Until the truth about these violations comes out, rumours will persist and climate of fear will remain.

In particular, Amnesty International is calling on the international community to act urgently to help Rwanda's people in four specific ways:

- expand international human rights monitoring
- send UN civilian police monitors
- re-build Rwanda's judicial system
- extend the jurisdiction of the Yugoslavia criminal tribunal to Rwanda

The United Nations should expand international human rights monitoring into all 70 of Rwanda's districts. Observers would monitor the safety of detainees and people returning to their homes, investigate and take up individual cases of human rights violations.

"We welcome an initiative by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to send extra observers, bringing the total to 26, but so few monitors is woefully inadequate," Amnesty International said.

After the High Commissioner appealed for financing for such a deployment, the United States Government has offered \$1 million, which only covers half the cost of deploying 20 for the first six months. The United Kingdom has pledged \$375,000, New Zealand \$50,000, France \$227,000, and Norway \$100,000, while the governments of Canada, The Netherlands and Germany are also reportedly considering giving money.

"We welcome such pledges of money to send out human rights monitors, but wonder at the silence of the other countries of the world," Amnesty International said. "To create an effective monitoring presence, much more must be pledged and actually paid out or too few will arrive too late."

UN civilian police (CivPols) and military observers should be sent to Rwanda immediately. The CivPols should train a new police force with an emphasis on investigation and prevention of human rights violations, including prompt and independent investigations of the widespread rumours of extrajudicial executions and other violations by government forces.

"It is scandalous that because of bureaucratic and political delay by governments, the unarmed observer component of the UN peace-keeping operation still is not fully deployed," Amnesty International said. "Monitors alone cannot make the country safe, but their very presence can help build confidence and dissuade further human rights violations."

The international community should help re-build Rwanda's judicial system, which has virtually collapsed, by helping the country recruit and train independent and impartial prosecutors, judges, and prison officials. This help should include providing financial help, advice and, if necessary, temporary international staff.

"This is a window of opportunity for the world to step in and support efforts to rebuild a human rights culture out of the wasteland of genocide," the organization said. "Government officials with whom we spoke -- including the President -- are asking for international help to establish a society of law and order."

The UN should also extend the jurisdiction of the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to include prosecution of crimes in Rwanda. But this is a stop-gap measure pending the establishment of a permanent international criminal court with global jurisdiction.

"We welcome the new government's stated acceptance to try perpetrators of killings at the international level," Amnesty International said. "But action must be taken soon, because delay or inadequate action will send the wrong signal that human rights violations can be committed with impunity."

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