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BURUNDI: HOW MANY MORE MUST DIE BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY TAKES ACTION?

More than 1,000 people are killed by government forces and armed groups each month in Burundi, but the world continues to turn a blind eye to such atrocities, Amnesty International said today.

“Over 100,000 people have been slaughtered in Burundi since the current civil war broke out in October 1993, but the international community has persistently failed its victims by its silence and inaction,” the human rights organization said.

More than 1,300 have been killed since the start of November 1995. Amnesty International is highlighting the killings which have been reported since then, but is sadly aware that many more massacres have gone unreported in the inaccessible provinces of Bubanza and Cibitoke where fighting between government forces and rebels has intensified during 1995. Most victims are unarmed women, children and the aged.

“The government has shown itself incapable of preventing its security forces from unlawfully killing unarmed civilians and carrying out other human rights violations,” Amnesty International said.

Most of those killed by the security forces are members of the Hutu ethnic group from which the majority political party, Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), of President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, draws its support. For example, government forces surrounded Gasarara in Kanyosha district, Rural Bujumbura province, on 14 November and killed at least 430 unarmed civilians, virtually all of them Hutu. The soldiers also looted property and set houses on fire. There are reports that some civilians were lured to assemble in a school, ostensibly for their own protection, and then shot or bayoneted to death.

In a letter to the provincial governor dated 20 November, the Kanyosha district administrator said he had counted 421 dead: 40 men, 73 women, 165 boys and 143 girls. An inquiry carried out by security officials reportedly established that at least 430 people were killed, while other sources claim that at least 500 people were extrajudicially executed and many others “disappeared”. The results of the inquiry have not been made public.

“It is only when security officials break their usual practice of secrecy, that the cycle of impunity will be broken and those responsible will be brought to justice,” Amnesty International said.

Nearly 300 unarmed civilians, most of them Hutu, were reportedly unlawfully killed by government forces between 6 and 7 December in the Bujumbura suburbs of Mutanga-nord,

Kiriri, Gihosha and Kanyosha. At least 270 of the victims were killed on Sororezo hill by soldiers using automatic weapons, rockets and helicopter gunships. The killings took place in the wake of what the Burundi authorities said were clashes between government forces and rebels belonging to the Hutu-dominated *Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie* (CNDD), National Council for the Defence of Democracy. The CNDD has denied involvement in the attacks. Some of the attacks by government forces appear to be a continuation of attempts by the Tutsi-dominated security forces to rid Bujumbura of Hutu.

Hutu armed groups have also killed scores of Tutsi. For example, an armed gang attacked Campazi camp for displaced members of the Tutsi ethnic group in Muruta district, Kirundo province and killed about 40. Some of the killings by Tutsi militia have also been carried out with the support or connivance of the security forces.

BACKGROUND

Further killings were reported in Kanyosha district on 26 November when soldiers attacked a group of youths playing football at Nyamaboko primary school. Some soldiers reportedly accused one youth from Rumonge of being a member of a gang which sabotaged a power station in Rumonge. They beat and then shot the youth dead. Other youths fled in panic and were pursued by the soldiers. Soldiers then went on the rampage in the area and killed as many as 500 people.

“It is a tragedy that the international community -- including foreign diplomats and representatives of the UN and the Organization of African Unity -- has become a powerless spectator. Although most of the killings are carried out by government troops, when they are criticized, Burundi authorities complain that the army is being vilified (*diabolisée*),” a Bujumbura-based observer told Amnesty International.

Hutu-dominated and Tutsi armed groups appear to be in virtual competition to kill large numbers of civilians suspected of supporting their rivals. On the nights of 1 and 2 November at least four people were shot dead and about 20 wounded by an armed gang in Buyenzi, a suburb of the capital, Bujumbura.

Prominent members of the Burundi society continue to be targeted by members of the security forces and armed groups. For example, on the evening of 2 December at least five Hutu were taken away by soldiers in Mutanga-Nord suburb of Bujumbura. They included Elie Ndikumana, an official of the Ministry of Public Works and Equipment, Dr Gaspard Nzikobanyanka, Nestor Katihabwa, a Burundi University student, Sylvestre Niyonzima and a nightwatchman called Donatien. Their bodies and the body of an unidentified person were found near Bujumbura airport several days later; apparently they had been extrajudicially executed.

During the counter-insurgency operation on 6 and 7 December government forces also attacked the homes of several Hutu officials, including that of Augustin Nzojibwami, the Secretary General of FRODEBU, Fabien Sagatwa, Secretary of State for Security, and Antoinette Bazikwankana, a former official at the Presidency.

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