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Rwanda: Deeper into the Abyss - Waging war on civil society

"Reminiscent of last year's attack on the single political party that could have effectively opposed the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) party prior to national elections, the Rwandese National Assembly is inappropriately manipulating the concept of genocide to silence not only organizations and individuals critical of the government but organizations who have a close relationship with the Rwandese people and whose loyalty the government questions," Amnesty International said today.

On 30 June 2004, after three days of debate, the Rwandese parliament accepted the recommendations of the parliamentary commission created to investigate the existence and spread of a "genocide ideology" in Rwanda following the assassination of three genocide survivors between April and November 2003.

Several institutions, including a range of religious institutions, schools and national and international non-governmental organizations, were accused in the report of either supporting genocide or disseminating its principle tenets.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Commission's report, which appears to be based on vague allegations and insubstantial research, not only places a number of individuals at risk - the death penalty was demanded by several parliamentarians for the leaders of the named organizations.

The Rwandese National Assembly supported the Commission's recommendations that five of the Rwandese NGOs: LIPRODHOR, FOR, SDA-IRIBA, Witnesses of the Resurrection and Keeping the Memory of Family be dissolved. Sections of the named religious institutions which have not regularly registered with the government are also to be dissolved. International NGO's will receive a government warning.

"If these measures are enforced by the government, the loss to civil society, already under sustained attack from the Rwandese authorities, cannot be underestimated," the organization said. "Amnesty International condemns the killing of genocide survivors. However heinous these crimes, they should not be manipulated to eliminate the legitimate and lawful actions of civil society."

Background

The Commission, composed of ten deputies, was created on 20 January 2004 as a response to the assassinations of three genocide survivors in Gikongoro province: Charles Rutinduka on 26 November 2003, Emile Ndahimana on October 2003 and Elie Karangira on April 2003. The deputy's five-month investigation concluded that a "genocidal ideology" was widespread, though the evidence for this appears to be based more on alleged or potential opposition to the government than it does the propagation of

genocide.

Religious institutions alleged to possess a genocidal ideology include the Catholic Church, some sections of the Episcopal Church, the Free Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the Association of Pentecostal Churches and Jehovah Witnesses. Secondary schools include: Kansi (Butare province), Rebero (Byumba), Gatovu and Busoga (Ruhengeri), APEJERWA (Gisenyi) and the small seminary of Nyakabanda. The National University of Rwanda was also cited.

Non-governmental organizations (NGO's) that are being targeted include: the Rwandese League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (LIPRODHOR), *Ligue Rwandaise pour la Promotion et la Défense des Droits de l'Homme*, Forum of Rural Organizations (FOR), *Forum des Organisations Rurales*, Servicing the Development of Associations (SDA-IRIBA), *Services au Développement des Associations*, Witnesses of the Resurrection, *Témoins de la résurrection* and Keeping the Memory of Family, *Souvenirs des Parents du district de Gasiza*, IMBARAGA [forum for farmers cooperation], Bureau for Supporting Rural Initiatives (BAIR), *Bureau d'appui aux organisations rurales*, CRECAM [mutual aid fund for Agriculturists and Pastoralists], 11.11.11, Norwegian People's Aid, Trocaire, Care International, *Pax Christi* and the Adolph Kolping Foundation.

Neither the Commission nor the Rwandese National Assembly recommended that all of the NGO's cited in the report be dissolved. For some NGO's, the problem existed but was felt not to be sufficiently serious to require their dissolution.

Another report issue by a different parliamentary commission on 14 April 2003 led to the dissolution of the Democratic Republican Movement (MDR), *Mouvement Démocratique Republicain* and the disappearance, flight or detention of several prominent political, administrative or military figures.