

**RWANDA/BURUNDI Hundreds of Burundi refugees in Rwanda**

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More than 300 Burundi refugees are at imminent risk of being forcibly returned to Burundi from Rwanda. The refugees, who were forcibly expelled from a transit centre near Kisangani, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on 5 September 1997, could be at risk of serious human rights abuse should they return to Burundi. According to some reports, up to at least 135 of the Burundi refugees have already returned to Burundi.

The Rwandese authorities are reported to have stated that they will return all the Burundi refugees expelled from DRC to Burundi. Some of those forcibly expelled to Rwanda have said they wish to return to Burundi rather than remain in Rwanda. However, at least 150 refugees, including 91 from Cibitoke province, northern Burundi, have said they do not wish to return. It is unclear whether they will be allowed to stay in Rwanda.

There is a high level of armed conflict and related human rights abuses in Cibitoke province. Much of the population is displaced and is living in camps. Camps themselves have been attacked, often by armed groups, and scores of inhabitants deliberately and arbitrarily killed. Nearly 1,000 refugees are reported to have fled in early September 1997 from Cibitoke Province to Rwanda.

The DRC authorities have threatened to repatriate any Burundian and Rwandese refugees remaining in DRC by 15 September 1997. More than 400 Rwandese refugees were forcibly returned to Rwanda from DRC on 5 September. Rwandese soldiers in the DRC are reported to have been involved in the expulsion of these refugees.

In the DRC, soldiers have been deployed where refugees have gathered in various parts of the country, and there are fears that many more refugees could be forced back to Rwanda or Burundi.

See EXTRA 124/97 (AFR 02/27/97, 9 September 1997) for further information.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The human rights situation in Burundi remains of grave concern. Massive human rights abuses continue on an almost daily basis in most parts of the country, including extrajudicial executions by the security forces and deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed opposition groups. In a number of provinces where there has been armed conflict, large numbers of people from the Hutu population have been forcibly relocated into "regroupment" camps. Hundreds of people have been killed in the process. Conditions in the camps are appalling and camps themselves are vulnerable to attack. Given the well documented pattern of human rights violations against the Hutu population carried out by the Burundi security forces sometimes in reprisal for attacks by Hutu armed groups, Amnesty International is also concerned that regroupment camps could be subjected to attacks by members of the security forces, in which large scale human rights violations could occur. Additionally, hundreds of refugees who have been forcibly returned to Burundi from DRC, Tanzania and Rwanda have been extrajudicially executed soon after their return.

Between 25 August and 2 September 1997, more than 1,700 Burundian refugees were returned from Gikongoro, southern Rwanda to Burundi. The refugees had stated their wish to return, although according to information gathered by Amnesty

International many of the refugees may have been coerced into registering for "voluntary repatriation".

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French or English or your own language:**

**To the Rwandese authorities:**

- appealing to them not to forcibly return refugees to Burundi;
- stressing that refugees forcibly returned to Burundi are likely to face serious human rights violations there such as torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution;
- appealing to them not to exert pressure on the refugees to return while the situation in Burundi remains unsafe;
- reminding them of their international obligations under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees to protect refugees and not to return them to a country where they will be at risk.

Also:

- asking that they ensure the safety of all Rwandese returnees from the DRC and that returnees be protected from human rights violations in Rwanda.

**To the Burundi authorities (telegrams/faxes only, unless postal service working from your country) in French or in your own language:**

- urging them to take immediate steps to improve the human rights situation in Burundi to enable refugees to return voluntarily and safely;
- appealing to them to set up mechanisms for monitoring the safe return and reintegration of returnees;
- expressing concern that no investigation has been carried out into the extrajudicial executions of hundreds of returnees in recent months.

**APPEALS TO:**

Vice-President and Minister of Defence

Général-Major Paul KAGAME

Vice-Président de la République et Ministre de la Défense

Présidence de la République

BP 23, KIGALI, Rwanda

**Faxes: +250 72431 / 76969**

**Telegrams: Vice-President, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Vice-Président / Dear Vice-President**

Minister of the Interior, of local development and social reintegration

M.Cheikh Abdul Karim HARELIMANA

Ministre de l'Intérieur, du Développement communal et de la réintégration sociale

BP 446 KIGALI

Rwanda

**Telegrams: Ministre de l'Intérieur, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Faxes: +250 85 714**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Ministre**

Minister of the family, the advancement of women and social affairs

Madame Aloysie INYUMBA

Ministre de la Famille, de la Promotion féminine et des Affaires sociales

BP 1413 KIGALI

Rwanda

**Telegrams: Ministre de la Famille, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Faxes: +250 77 543**

**Salutation: Madame le Ministre / Dear Minister**

Burundi Minister for Reintegration and Resettlement of the Displaced and Returnees

Monsieur Pascal NKURUNZIZA

Ministre à la Réinsertion et à la Réinstallation des Déplacés et des Rapatriés  
BP 2645,

Ministère à la Réinsertion et à la Réinstallation des Déplacés et des Rapatriés  
Bujumbura, Burundi

**Telegrams: Ministre à la Réinsertion, Bujumbura, Burundi**

**Faxes: +257 21 82 01 (may require several attempts)**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Burundi Minister of Interior

Mon. Epitace BAYAGANAKANDI

Ministre de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité Publique

Ministère de l'Intérieur

Bujumbura, Burundi

**Faxes: +257 22 74 90** c/o The office of the President

and to diplomatic representatives of RWANDA/BURUNDI accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 October 1997.