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BURUNDI: ONGOING CRISIS IN BURUNDI PUSHES TENS OF THOUSANDS MORE REFUGEES INTO TANZANIA AND ZAIRE.

Continuing mass human rights violations in Burundi have caused thousands more people to try to flee the country in the last few weeks. Amnesty International is raising these latest concerns, summarized below, in the context of its recent field research and ongoing campaigning on human rights issues facing refugees in the Great Lakes region.

INFORMATION UPDATE

On 17 January 1996, around 15,000 Rwandese refugees fled the refugee camp of Mugano in Muyinga province, in northeastern Burundi, and crossed into Tanzania. Their flight reportedly took place following fighting around Mugano camp, apparently between government forces and armed groups. It is unclear whether refugees or unarmed Burundi civilians were specifically targeted. Up to eight of those who crossed into Tanzania reportedly had gunshot wounds. Tanzania - which is already host to around 700,000 Rwandese and Burundi refugees and had closed its border with Burundi on 31 March 1995 - exceptionally allowed in the 15,000 refugees fleeing from Mugano. However, the Tanzanian authorities made it clear that this was only a temporary measure. It is feared that some may be returned against their will to Burundi or Rwanda.

On 20 and 21 January, a further 16,000 Rwandese and some Burundi asylum-seekers fled towards the Tanzanian border from Ntamba, around 10km north of Muyinga province's administrative headquarters. They were initially turned back at the border by the Tanzanian authorities. Some have since begun returning to Ntamba camp; others have begun making their way to Rwanda. But the majority remain waiting at the border with Tanzania. Meanwhile, Burundi security forces had reportedly burned down some of the huts of refugees who wanted to stay in the refugee camp at Ntamba, thus making it clear that the refugees were not wanted.

On 24 January, there were contradictory reports about whether Tanzania has reopened its border to allow in the second group of refugees.

This crisis is only the latest in the human rights tragedy facing refugees and internally displaced persons in the Great Lakes region. Widespread violence in Burundi has caused around 200,000 people to flee their country since October 1993; very few have returned. A further 400,000 are internally displaced or dispersed within Burundi. These unarmed civilians, who include many women, elderly people and young children, have been forced to flee to escape attacks by the security forces and armed opposition groups.

Mass flight is continuing: in one month alone, between mid-December 1995 and mid-January 1996, fighting in Burundi's northwestern provinces of Cibitoke and Bubanza caused

around 20,000 more to flee to Uvira, in eastern Zaire - which is already host to around 160,000 Burundi refugees. The massacres and displacement of the population in these two provinces are largely unreported because of the inaccessibility of these areas.

The plight of refugees from Burundi has tended to be overlooked as attention has concentrated on the refugees from Rwanda - around two million of whom fled their country in the aftermath of the genocide which claimed as many as one million lives between April and July 1994. The majority of these Rwandese refugees have still not returned to their country either. The prolonged presence of both Rwandese and Burundi refugees has caused a severe strain on the countries of asylum - primarily Tanzania and Zaire - and has had a devastating impact on their economy, environment and security in the border areas. It has also resulted in increasing hostility towards the refugees by the local population and authorities of the host countries, especially in Zaire. Rwandese refugees in Burundi have often been accused by the Burundi authorities of being members of the *interahamwe* militia (who carried out most of the mass killing which took place in Rwanda between April and July 1994) and of acting in collusion with extremist Hutu groups in Burundi.

While the Tanzanian government has so far refrained from mass *refoulement* of the kind undertaken by Zaire in August 1995, Tanzanian authorities have nevertheless warned, on several occasions, that the refugees cannot stay indefinitely. This point has been reiterated in the last few days in the face of the latest influx.

#### AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S APPEAL

##### APPEAL TO THE TANZANIAN GOVERNMENT

Amnesty International is urgently appealing to the Tanzanian government to keep open its border with Burundi and provide asylum to refugees who are at risk of human rights violations if they remain in Burundi. Likewise, the Tanzanian authorities should not forcibly return Rwandese refugees who could face human rights violations if returned to Rwanda. Many of those who have fled Burundi in the last few days are Rwandese refugees, who originally left their own country for fear of human rights violations. They - like thousands of others - have joined a growing number of unwanted citizens, shunted backwards and forwards between countries and unable to return to their homes, as a direct consequence of mass human rights violations.

While appreciating the enormous burden placed upon Tanzania by the massive influx of refugees in the last two years, Amnesty International is reminding the Tanzanian Government of its international obligations not to forcibly return any refugee or asylum-seeker -- as prescribed by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

Amnesty International is simultaneously appealing to foreign governments and international organizations to provide the necessary aid and material assistance to Tanzania and Zaire to help them meet these obligations and to protect all refugees and asylum-seekers who may be at risk.

##### APPEAL TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF BURUNDI AND RWANDA

However, Amnesty International is stressing that these are merely short-term measures which, by themselves, cannot be expected to end the human rights crisis in the region. The governments of Burundi and Rwanda have the primary responsibility for ensuring that respect for human rights is restored in their country so that people are not forced to flee and those who wish to return can do so in safety and dignity. Authorities in Burundi and Rwanda should take steps to prevent attacks on or by people living in refugee camps or camps for the internally displaced and ensure that

members of their own security forces do not carry out or condone attacks on dispersed population.

#### APPEAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The international community must persist in its efforts to help bring about long-term solutions. So far, attention and resources have tended to focus on reacting to each crisis as it occurs. While this is understandable and necessary, the international community must also keep searching for solutions which will have a longer-term impact on the human rights situation in the region. Unless such solutions are found, human rights violations will continue and large numbers of people will continue fleeing to escape the violence.

Foreign governments and inter-governmental organizations must use their influence on the authorities in Burundi and Rwanda to ensure that the right conditions are created for people to be able to live in peace, in their own country. Parties involved in mediation or peace talks to resolve the conflicts in the region should ensure that concrete measures to protect human rights are prioritized in their recommendations and they should set up specific monitoring mechanisms to ensure that these measures are adhered to.

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