

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 260/94 Last Chance to Save Burundi

6 July 1994

Burundi

Tension is mounting in the central African country of Burundi a week after the extremist political party, the PALIPEHUTU*, began broadcasting politically inflammatory messages, encouraging the domination of the country by the majority Hutu ethnic group.

The radio broadcasts come in the wake of continuing political and ethnic killings by the security forces, and the run-up to presidential elections on 12 July. There is a serious breakdown of law and order in Burundi, resulting from the government's inability to control the armed forces or the activities of other armed groups. Recent instability in the north has also been aggravated by an influx of refugees fleeing from the carnage in neighbouring Rwanda.

Amnesty International is raising the alarm over the potential crisis in Burundi, and is calling on the international community to urgently take effective human rights action to prevent a repeat of the massive human rights crisis which has occurred in neighbouring Rwanda. Governments and international bodies must be forced to pay attention to Burundi and to send monitors to block further massive violations of human rights.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Under the Burundi Constitution, a new President, to replace Cyprien Ntaryamira who was killed in the same plane crash as Rwanda's President Habyarimaka, must be elected by 12 July.

There have been reports of clashes in suburbs of Bujumbura between the Tutsi-dominated army and armed groups of Hutu extremists. Hundreds of unarmed, mainly Hutu civilians, have been extrajudicially executed by the army in recent months, often defenceless victims killed while soldiers were supposed to be disarming armed government opponents.

Violence engulfed most of Burundi in the aftermath of an attempted coup in October 1993 during which the country's first democratically elected president, Melchior Ndadaye, was killed by soldiers. Between October and December 1993, up to 100,000 defenceless people were killed. Many Hutu civilians were extrajudicially executed by the security forces, some of them in reprisal for the killing of Tutsi by Hutu gangs. Although the violence had abated by the end of 1993, frequent killings of Hutu by members of the security forces have continued. Burundi society has become severely polarised as a result of the killings and there is a very real risk that Burundi could soon witness another massive human rights crisis.

* PALIPEHUTU: Parti pour la libération du peuple Hutu

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Groups and sections are encouraged to organize public events outside the Burundi Embassy in your country as well as outside your own Foreign Ministry. Please also telephone/send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

To your Home Government:

- urging them to pay serious and immediate attention to the situation in Burundi in view of the increasing tension there and the real likelihood of further mass killings on the scale of what has been witnessed in Rwanda;
- asking your government to ensure that what happened in neighbouring Rwanda, as a result of the failure of the international community to act on warnings by the UN's rapporteur on extra-judicial killings does not occur in Burundi;
- asking your government to support human rights initiatives taken by the UN and OAU which can help to prevent further human rights violations in Burundi.

To the UN:

- expressing alarm at the deep polarization of Burundi society and its potential consequences for the future of human rights;
- urging that the UN cooperates closely with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the implementation of short and long-term measures to address the human rights crisis in Burundi, as Amnesty International has been urging for several months;
- asking what steps the UN has taken to implement Amnesty International's recommendation that a human rights mission with both UN and OAU participation be sent to Burundi, including both human rights monitors and civilian police monitors (CIVPOLs).

APPEALS TO

1) The relevant Ministry in your Home Government (for most groups and sections this will be the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

2) United Nations (UN)

Marrack Goulding

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COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

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Permanent Mission of Burundi
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You may also like to send copies of this Urgent Action to the media in your own country, stressing the need to pay attention to the likelihood of a further crisis in Burundi.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.