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BURUNDI: WHY IS THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ALLOWING BURUNDI TO BLEED?

On 26 October yet another massacre by government forces took place in northern Burundi -- this time of about 250 people -- many of them women and children.

"We are shocked that in the face of such killings, the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) are still failing to mobilise resources to deploy human rights observers in Burundi," Amnesty International said.

. Over a four day period the organization has received reports of about 300 killed by government forces and armed groups, including those massacred on 26 October. While the authorities and political rivals in Burundi continue to dispute the identity and numbers of the victims, as well as the identity of the killers, virtually nothing is being done to prevent a recurrence of such tragedies.

"Human rights observers are urgently required to carry out independent and impartial investigations into the killings and other human rights abuses in Burundi and to take up cases with the government. Their absence contributes to the spiralling civil war and widespread politically motivated murders," Amnesty International said.

Since 1994, various UN organs, including the UN Security Council, have repeatedly called for the deployment of human rights observers in Burundi. The UN Secretary General has recommended their deployment to facilitate national reconciliation. In September 1995 the Geneva-based UN Centre for Human Rights deployed an official to head the human rights mission in Burundi. However, the funds promised by the EU to help fund these observers have not yet been released.

The EU is also understood to have decided to pay for a maximum of five human rights observers -- to be increased to 35 -- in a country where extrajudicial executions by government forces and deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed groups are counted in dozens and sometimes hundreds each week across the country. However, the deployment of these observers is contingent upon the EU releasing the promised funds. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) mission in Burundi could also play a useful role if it were given greater operational freedom and resources.

Several days ago, Amnesty International learned that as many as 250 unarmed Hutu civilians were massacred on 26 October 1995 by government forces in Tangara district (*commune*) of northern Burundi's Ngozi province. The killings were reportedly denied by the Minister of Defence and an army spokesperson, but denounced by Burundi's President visiting France at the time.

There are reports that the Burundi army has set up an inquiry into the most recent killings. However, the army has persistently denied past human rights violations by soldiers, including extrajudicial executions. It is therefore unlikely to carry out an impartial investigation into the latest in a series of killings by its own members.

On 2 November 1995 Radio Burundi reported that 42 people, including a soldier, were killed by an armed group in a camp of displaced members of the Tutsi ethnic group in Kayanza province in northern Burundi. On the same day there were reports that at least five people were killed and 10 injured by gunmen in Bujumbura's Buyenzi suburb.

Detainees have also died in custody. At least 26 prisoners detained in Karuzi were killed on 2 October 1995 when gendarmes reportedly threw a grenade into their cells and opened fire on those who tried to escape. There has been no independent investigation into these killings. On 21 October three other prisoners died in unclear circumstances at Bujumbura's Mpimba prison.

"If UN human rights observers had been deployed, they would have been best placed to carry out an independent and impartial investigation into these and other killings and seek action from the government," Amnesty International said.

. The observers could provide objective information and give advice on measures required to bring those responsible to justice and prevent a recurrence of such killings. The presence of an adequate number of independent observers across the country could also act as a deterrent to further abuses. Such an operation must be properly planned and monitor the actions of the security forces and armed political groups.

"As the UN and EU delay indefinitely the deployment of human rights observers, killings will continue in Burundi and the international community will remain unable to obtain accurate information to prevent further killings," Amnesty International said.

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