

AI INDEX: AFR 16/27/96
News Service: 152/96
22 AUGUST 1996

BURUNDI: MORE THAN 6,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED SINCE THE COUP D'ETAT

The human rights situation in Burundi continues to deteriorate, despite promises by Major Pierre Buyoya who came to power on 25 July 1996 to end killings and prevent forcible repatriation of Rwandese refugees. More than 6,000 people are reported to have been killed in various parts of Burundi in a space of three weeks since 25 July 1996.

“Detailed reports of serious human rights abuses in Burundi show that promises of an end to violence which the new leaders of Burundi are not been kept. We are disturbed that as many people have been massacred since the coup as were reported killed in the preceding three months,” Amnesty International said.

The worldwide human rights organization learned that at least 4,050 unarmed civilians have been buried after being extrajudicially executed between 27 July and 10 August 1996 by Burundi government forces in Giheta district (*commune*) of Gitega province. Most of these victims were killed after the army came to their villages, ostensibly to obtain information about movements of rebels. Soldiers then assembled the victims and shot them, apparently after they denied knowledge of the whereabouts of rebels. The 4,050 victims do not include people who may have died from gunshot and other wounds in the bush or drowned in rivers while fleeing.

“As the army reportedly prevented access by independent observers to Nyabitanga, Mugera and Giheta areas, it becomes very difficult to obtain more details on such killings,” Amnesty International added. “This pattern is being repeated in other parts of the country.”

More massacres by government forces have been reported in rural Bujumbura, Muramvya, Kayanza and Cibitoke provinces. The wife and four children, one three years old, of Honorata Murishi in Rural Bujumbura's Muhuta district were extrajudicially executed on 29 July. In Mutimbuzi district, 39 people, 25 of them rice growers (*riziculteurs*) at Carama and Tenga, were extrajudicially executed on 9 August. On 7 August soldiers from Kiganda, Kanerwa and Bweza, with students from Kiganda, killed more than 200 people in Muramvya's Rutegama district.

At least six prisoners on death row in Mpimba prison, in Bujumbura, have been transferred to a secluded cell since 9 August. They risk being subjected to torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or being executed in the next few days. The transfer

took place a day after senior civil servants in Bujumbura demanded the public hanging of Hutu prisoners sentenced to death between February and June 1996 after grossly unfair trials.

“The death sentence as an ultimate cruel punishment would also further exacerbate the already intolerable violence in Burundi,” Amnesty International said.

The organization is also concerned about reports that all sides to the armed conflict are executing virtually all captured combatants.

Moreover, on 8 August government soldiers extrajudicially executed an affluent Hutu businessman known as Nkeshimana and six members of his family. On 10 August, about 30 peasants who were working in their fields “disappeared” after an army raid in Gasenyi, near Bujumbura. On 19 August 1996 government soldiers and Tutsi civilians from Ruhororo camp for the displaced reportedly attacked Mubuga health centre in Ngozi province, killing seven Hutu and looting the health centre. The same day, at least 200 troops entered and looted property in Nyambuye village (*colline*) near Bujumbura. On 20 August 1996 soldiers at Gasenyi, near Bujumbura, extrajudicially executed five unarmed civilians, including two teachers at the Bujumbura Higher Technical School (*Ecole technique supérieure*) and a secretary of Kamenge Roman Catholic parish.

Despite promises made by Major Buyoya that he would respect international law and stop refoulement of refugees, forcible repatriation has resumed. Burundi government forces are using torture and extrajudicial executions to frighten Rwandese refugees who live in the camps into returning to Rwanda.

“The army was making it clear that a similar fate awaits Rwandese refugees who remain in the camps. It appears that Major Buyoya has either gone back on his word or is not in control of the forces which brought him to power,” Amnesty International said.

Refugees coming from Magara camp reported that government soldiers had intimidated them on 14 August by shooting in the air. Soldiers and Tutsi civilians reportedly entered Magara camp on the night of 18 August and burnt some huts. Smoke was reported to be still visible in the camp on 19 August. In addition, the governor of the province of Kirundo has reportedly stated that the Rukuramigabo refugee camp, with a population of 12,000 refugees, will be “emptied” by the military by 22 or 23 August.

About 30 refugees, including two unaccompanied minors aged eight and 15 and three women, arrested on 19 July 1996 and detained at Ngozi Gendarmerie detention centre (*brigade*) were severely tortured. At least four of them died in custody. The refugees had been deprived of food and medical care, although they had sustained severe injuries and lacerations. One of them, Alphonse Irisomotse, had what was described as a “dangerously infected wound”, while another, Joseph Ndagijimana, lost movement in one arm.

“The Burundi authorities should order the immediate and unconditional release of any Rwandese nationals still held solely because they are refugees,” Amnesty International said.

“The authorities should also investigate reports that many of those arrested in July 1996 were severely tortured with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice.”

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