

BURUNDI

Refugees forced back to danger

Refugees from Burundi returning to their country are facing the same human rights abuses that forced them to flee in the first place. The civil war and ethnic violence in Burundi have not abated since October 1993. Killings of unarmed civilians, including the elderly and children, are reported virtually every week. At least 10,000 casualties have been recorded since Major Pierre Buyoya took power in a military coup on 25 July 1996.

Tutsi-led armed groups in Zaire are forcing the refugees to leave Zaire and are handing them over to Burundi government forces at the border. The Zairian government has stated that all refugees from Burundi and Rwanda must leave. But there are no guarantees of safety once the Burundi refugees return. Amnesty International is continuing to receive reports of human rights abuses in Burundi by both the Tutsi-dominated Burundi armed forces and Hutu-led armed groups. As many as 500 people who have returned to Burundi in recent weeks are reported to have been killed by Burundi government forces. Others have “disappeared”.

The international community has not taken steps to protect the human rights of refugees from Burundi. It is apparently willing to see refugees returned to Burundi, even though they will be at risk of human rights violations there. The situation in Burundi is deteriorating, yet the international community has remained silent and has failed to take action to protect the vulnerable.

The civil war: a deliberate policy of elimination

Tens of thousands of refugees from Burundi who sought sanctuary in Zaire fled from mass killings directed against members of the Hutu ethnic group. The Tutsi elite in Burundi, which dominates the security forces, has pursued a deliberate political strategy to eliminate or expel potential Hutu opposition. This strategy led to the assassination of Burundi's first elected president in October 1993, to the coup that brought Major Pierre Buyoya to power in July 1996, and to the pattern of mass killings which has cost the lives of over 150,000 men, women and children in three years.

Thousands of members of the Hutu ethnic group fled to eastern Zaire in November 1993 after the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye during a coup attempt. Tens of thousands of people, both Hutu and Tutsi, died during the intercommunal massacres which followed and thousands of Hutu crossed to Bukavu and Uvira in eastern Zaire.

Hutu were then systematically forced out of the capital, Bujumbura, by the security forces and armed Tutsi groups. Hutu were expelled from Musaga district between December 1993 and January 1994. After a short period of calm in early 1994, Hutu were again hunted down by government armed forces and armed Tutsi civilians in Nyakabiga district, followed by Ngagara and Cibitoke districts.

In March 1994, at least 300 people were massacred in the Kamenge district of the capital. Many of the corpses were thrown into the Ruzizi river.

From September 1994 to August 1995, government forces and Tutsi militia expelled virtually all Hutu from most of Bujumbura's Nyakabiga, Bwiza and Buyenzi districts. Many civil servants and members of parliament resorted to staying in Uvira by night and working in Bujumbura by day. After numerous attacks on Hutu in educational institutions, including the national university in Bujumbura, most Hutu teachers and intellectuals fled to neighbouring Zaire and Tanzania.

Hutu-led armed groups have also deliberately and arbitrarily killed civilians. In particular, the *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie*, (CNDD), National Council for the Defence of Democracy, the *Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu*, (PALIPEHUTU), Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People and the *Front pour la Libération Nationale*, (FROLINA), Front for National Liberation, have carried out attacks against camps for displaced Tutsi.

Since the first quarter of 1996, Hutu armed groups have extended their attacks to almost all provinces, leaving virtually no part of Burundi unaffected by the civil war. The pattern of human rights abuses has escalated, with Hutu armed groups carrying out attacks, and the security forces and Tutsi armed groups committing reprisal killings. Tutsi politicians have responded to the escalating violence by advocating "self-defence units" and "screening the enemy" – generally understood to be the Hutu.

Since August 1996, the authorities have introduced military service for Tutsi youth, including students. Thousands of members of Tutsi armed groups who have been responsible for widespread human rights abuses have been incorporated into the government forces. Virtually no action has been taken against Tutsi who have perpetrated human rights abuses, leading many to believe that they will continue to enjoy impunity. Thousands of Hutu have been arrested, ostensibly in connection with the violence, but rather than being brought to justice they have mostly been held without trial.

Violence in eastern Zaire

In October 1996, Tutsi-led armed groups attacked refugee camps in eastern Zaire, forcing many of the refugees to flee further inside Zaire without protection, food or shelter. (See Amnesty International's report *Zaire: Lawlessness and insecurity in North and South-Kivu*, AI Index AFR 62/14/96.)

Amnesty International has learned that the armed groups, which allegedly included Rwandese troops as well as Zairians, crossed Rwanda and Burundi on their way to eastern Zaire. Members of the armed groups reportedly crossed to Zaire through the Rukoko area at the border with Zaire between 21 and 23 October. Similar incursions into Zaire through Cabiza were reported later. These incursions preceded the attacks by Tutsi armed groups on Runingo refugee camp. The groups then attacked two hospitals run by missionaries. At Lemera, 37 patients were killed. At Kaziba, 26 patients were killed.

Tutsi-led armed groups reportedly attacked Burundi refugees in Uvira to force them to return to Burundi. They reportedly killed a Burundi MP, Thomas Bukuru, and his entire

family. The same armed groups reportedly killed another MP, Isidore Bapfeguhita, on 14 November 1996 in Uvira.

Refugees: return to danger

Burundi refugees returning home have to go through roadblocks set up in Burundi to screen identity cards. Many Hutu are reportedly arrested at these roadblocks on the grounds that a corner cut off from their identity cards indicates that they are members of the CNDD.

However, Amnesty International has learned that the corners were cut off by UNHCR officials to prevent refugees from being registered more than once.

People are also arrested because of the colour of the stamp in their identity cards. Identity cards with a green stamp are said to have been delivered by the CNDD. Yet Amnesty International has learned that many identity cards issued by officials in Bujumbura bear the same green stamp.

On 22 October at least 400 returnees from Zaire were reportedly rounded up by members of the Burundi security forces at Muramba Seventh Day Adventist Church, Cibitoke Province. The adult males were then shot dead or bayoneted to death. Also killed were Juliette, a former headmistress of the Rukana Primary School and her son, Abasi; Hosana Gushima, a former teacher at the Munyika primary school; and Annika, a teacher at Rugombo Secondary School.

On 27 October, 20 people who were returning from Zaire by canoe on Lake Tanganyika were reportedly arrested in Kabezi and taken to Bujumbura and tortured after being forced to give 200,000 Burundi francs to soldiers. They were allegedly taken back to Kabezi in a government bus but nobody has seen them since that day. Amnesty International believes they have “disappeared.”

Also on 27 October, 40 returnees from Zaire were reportedly killed before reaching the Gatumba transit camp. Among the victims were Isaias Barasengeta and his children, Hakizimana, aged 10, and Viateur Bukuru, aged five, Clotilde Nizigiyimana and her three young children, Spès Maninzana, aged two, Odette Habumuremyi, aged four, and Vestine Bigirimana, just eight months old.

On 1 November, a former governor of Cankuzo province, Vestine Mbudagu and her husband, Frédéric Vyungimana, who had returned that day were allegedly detained at the *Brigade Spéciale des Recherches*, (BSR), Special Investigation Brigade headquarters. Their relatives have been unable to trace them since, and fear that they may have “disappeared”.

On 5 November, Melchior Bigirimana, an engineer and a member of PALIPEHUTU, apparently “disappeared” after passing through a UNHCR transit camp.

On or around 10 November 1996, at least 46 Burundi nationals who had just returned from Zaire are reported to have been shot and bayoneted to death by the security forces in the Bwiza district of Bujumbura.

The civil war continues: recent killings of civilians

Killings of civilians by the Tutsi-dominated armed forces, by Tutsi armed groups acting in collusion with the armed forces, and by Hutu groups continue to be reported virtually every week.

About 88 people are reported to have been killed between 28 September and 16 October by government forces in Kabanga zone, Giheta district. Those killed include Bernadette Mbanje, aged 67, Serge Kariyo, aged 60, Audace Niyinteretse, who was just two years old, and Stéphane Nzinahora, aged 41.

On 13 October at least 50 people were arrested and extrajudicially executed by soldiers in Matana, Bururi province. The victims were accused of belonging to Hutu armed groups.

On 22 October seven detainees at the Giheta detention centre were extrajudicially executed by members of the armed forces.

Between 20 October and 2 November 1996, the armed forces reportedly extrajudicially executed 49 people in Mutaho district. The victims include Prosper Sindayigaya of Masango, Antoine Kibwa, Marcel Ndashinze, Domitille Baranshamakaje, Farah Bukende, Pascal Baragwandakaja and Athanase Bangoye.

On 2 November about 47 people were reportedly killed by the Burundi armed forces and displaced Tutsi in Giheta. Among the victims were 90-year-old Vital Bararusesa, Marc Seseme and Pierre Murekambanze.

Between 8 and 11 November the armed forces allegedly killed 75 unarmed civilians in Gishubi, 20 in Nyabiraba and 30 in Makebuka, in Gitega province.

On 12 November members of the armed forces at the roadblock of Mont Sion in Gihosha, Mutanga-Nord district of Bujumbura extrajudicially executed Ngendanganya, Oscar Nikwigize, Jérémie Bampworubusa, Révérien Nzoyihaya, Salvator Ntawumenya, Adalbert Matabaro and Sylvestre after tearing up the victims’ identity cards. Their families were not allowed to collect the bodies and were allegedly threatened by military authorities for saying that their relatives had been killed by members of the armed forces.

On 14 November 1996, 17 people were allegedly extrajudicially executed by members of the armed forces in Ramba, in Rural Bujumbura province. Among the victims were a businessman, Ruviwabo, and a number of women and children.

On the same day soldiers based in Mugongomanga, Rushubi and Nyambuye reportedly killed 22 people in Sagara, Kibuye zone, Isale district in Rural Bujumbura district.

On 18 November relatives of Sévérin Mfatiye, a minister in the government ousted by the July coup, were reportedly extrajudicially executed by soldiers based at Ku Giti C'Inyoni roadblock in Nyambuye zone, Rural Bujumbura province. The victims included Béatrice, her two-month-old baby, Ernest, and Ceusi. Two other people were wounded while other members of the family were severely beaten. The soldiers reportedly took 250,000 Burundi francs from Béatrice's husband.

There have also been unconfirmed allegations of killings of civilians by Hutu armed groups. For example, on 29 September Hutu armed groups allegedly killed 35 civilians during an attack on a military position in Nyeshanza, Cibitoke province.

On 4 October Hutu rebels allegedly killed five people in Midodo, Bururi province.

Hutu armed groups reportedly attacked a camp for displaced Tutsi in Buraniro, Kayanza province on 21 October, killing 12 people.

The following day, 22 October, Hutu groups allegedly killed 16 people at Busanga, Burambi district, Bururi province. Seven other people are still missing after the attack.

Conclusion

The continuing abuses against Burundi's civilian population reflect a lack of political will on the part of the Burundi authorities to end them. Despite promises made by Major Pierre Buyoya in July 1996 to end human rights violations, the authorities are condoning or even ordering flagrant violations by the security forces. The international community cannot expect refugees to return to a country where human rights abuses are still widespread. The international community should condemn the Tutsi-led armed groups in eastern Zaire for forcing Burundi refugees to return home, and the Zairian authorities for stating that they may not remain. The international community has allowed Burundi to slip off its agenda while the situation has rapidly deteriorated. Vulnerable people are receiving no protection. The international community's silence and lack of action can not be allowed to continue.