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ZAIRE: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS
AGAINST TUTSI

Amnesty International strongly condemns the atrocities committed over the past month by the Zairian security forces and government officials against members of the Banyamulenge Tutsi ethnic group in South-Kivu region.

The organization urgently appeals to Zairian Prime Minister, Léon Kengo wa Dondo, and armed forces Chief of Staff, General Eluki Monga, to take immediate measures to prevent these human rights violations and ensure that perpetrators of any abuses are brought to justice.

“An entire ethnic group cannot be held responsible or persecuted for the alleged violent actions of some of its members,” Amnesty International said today.

“We understand the Zairian authorities’ right to take action against armed opponents, but there is no justification for this calculated abuse of human rights -- including unlawful killings, “disappearances”, severe beatings and deportation or *refoulement* to another country.”

The human rights situation has significantly deteriorated since the start of September, following reports of clashes between the *Forces armées zairoises* (FAZ), Zairian Armed Forces, and members of a Tutsi armed group in Uvira district (*zone*). On 8 September members of the Zairian armed forces reportedly extrajudicially executed four Banyamulenge civilians in Uvira district in front of a crowd at Luberizi village.

Amnesty International is investigating allegations that more than 35 Banyamulenge were extrajudicially executed and more than 50 others “disappeared” by government troops at the start of the month.

Members of the FAZ have subjected Tutsi civilians to severe beatings. Very often, civilians arrested by soldiers are held in military detention centres where they are subjected to severe torture, sometimes resulting in death. On 16 September two United Nations (UN) staff were beaten by FAZ soldiers, after earlier accusations by the Zairian authorities that UN personnel had assisted the Tutsi armed group.

As many as 70 people, mostly Tutsi, were reportedly arrested and held without charge in Uvira town. Those detained included two Roman Catholic priests, Joseph Sibomana and André Semusambi, and two Rwandese Hutu seminarians, Jérémie Habyarimana and Pierre-Claver Nzeyimana. It is unclear how many of those arrested remain in custody. Some Tutsi were released after paying bribes to the security forces.

Political parties and newspapers have issued statements calling for violence against Tutsi.

Amnesty International is disturbed by accounts that Uvira District Commissioner (*Commissaire de zone*), Kyembwa wa Lumona, is alleged to have said that he would sack any local officials who sold land to Tutsi, and that houses vacated by Tutsi would be given to army officers.

He has reportedly authorized the enrolment of youths into the armed forces to fight the Tutsi armed group.

“At the best of times the FAZ are an undisciplined and poorly paid force. However, the enrolment of youths who are known to have been holding demonstrations against Tutsi and looting or destroying their property will only serve to exacerbate the situation for unarmed Tutsi civilians,” Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization is calling on Prime Minister Kengo wa Dondo to publicly condemn any statements or actions likely to incite violence against Tutsi. Also, such perpetrators should be immediately removed from positions in which they might have influence to cause, condone or encourage abuses, and measures taken to bring them to justice.

Commanders of the security forces in the region should be held personally responsible for any violations by their troops, and given instructions to prevent attacks and other human rights abuses against unarmed civilians by members of the security forces or civilians.

The authorities have claimed that the armed group is receiving training and logistical support from Uganda and the Tutsi-dominated armies of Burundi and Rwanda. Burundi and Rwanda have denied any links with the group. The group’s objectives remain unclear. The Zairian authorities have claimed that Banyamulenge are Rwandese nationals and supporters of the armed group.

More than 400 Tutsi, many of whom are reportedly Zairian nationals, have been rounded up by members of the FAZ and forcibly deported to neighbouring Rwanda and Burundi. In related persecution of Tutsi, many Tutsi in North-Kivu region have been killed and more than 18,000 have fled or have been deported in recent months to Rwanda where they live as refugees.

Several demonstrations organized by political leaders have taken place in recent days in Uvira and South-Kivu’s capital, Bukavu, to protest against what they call “aggression by Rwandese Tutsi”. Members of other ethnic groups have severely beaten many unarmed civilians suspected or known to be Tutsi, often in the presence of government or security officials who have not taken any action against the attackers. The authorities have banned organizations composed of Banyamulenge whose leaders have fled the country fearing arbitrary arrest and other human rights violations.

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