
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 62/94

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 30 MARCH 1984

NO OF WORDS:837

AI INDEX: NWS 11/62/94
DISTR: SC/PO

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - BURUNDI

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

****South Africa - 8 April**** - Report on Bophuthatswana and news release on lessons to be learned from Bophuthatswana upheaval.

Hong Kong - 21 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

Trade Unionists - 29 April - News release and focus article.

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - Report and news release on the treatment of Iraqi refugees in Saudi Arabia

Burundi - 16 May - SEE NEWS SERVICES 53/94 and 36/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Turkey - 30 March - SEE NEWS SERVICES 46/94 AND 26/94

Switzerland CAT - 19 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 53/94

Israel & OT CAT - 25 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 53/94

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Annual Report - 7 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

News Service 62/94

**AI INDEX: AFR 16/WU 05/1994
30 March 1994**

BURUNDI: THE KILLINGS CONTINUE

Burundi's cycle of violence, which erupted again last week in the killings of hundreds of civilians, may recur unless the government, political leaders and the security forces stop perpetrating or condoning human rights violations and instead condemn them, Amnesty International said.

"What's lacking in Burundi is a substantial commission of inquiry into the range of human rights violations committed there," Amnesty said. "The violence has continued for almost 40 years because those responsible have impunity: they have never been identified by any formal investigation or brought to justice for their crimes."

Amnesty International has urged the international community to help the government and citizens of Burundi to put in place measures to end the killings and prevent their recurrence.

"Outside international assistance could also support the implementation of recommendations from any impartial inquiry to strengthen respect for human rights, preventing killings in the future", said Amnesty International.

Training and equipment to the Burundi armed forces should be provided only when procedures for monitoring and accountability are in place to ensure that the military will use those resources as an impartial and humane protector of all Burundi citizens.

There are currently two mission from international governmental organizations present in Burundi. The United Nations Secretary General sent a three-person fact-finding mission, which arrived on the day the latest mass killings began, to investigate last year's coup attempt and the massacres of October 1993. It is unclear whether the mission will also examine what other activities might be undertaken by the United Nations in the future. The exact terms of reference or powers of the mission have not been made public. The Organization of African Unity pledged in late 1993 to send 180 soldiers and 20 civilians to assist Burundi to return to stability. So far, a 15-person OAU civilian team remains in Burundi reportedly trying to build "bridges of peace". A further OAU military team is carrying out logistic investigations after the OAU pledged to send a 180-strong peace-keeping force. However, opposition parties there voiced their resistance to the entry of OAU forces.

Amnesty International welcomes any international, independent monitoring presence in Burundi that could continuously report on the human rights situation there and provide an early warning of new outbreaks of violence. Such a monitoring mission should report through explicit and proper channels any human rights violation they may witness or serious allegations they receive. They should also make frequent comprehensive reports of their activities and findings, which should be broadly published nationally as well as internationally, Amnesty International said.

The latest round of killings began on 21 March 1994, when the Tutsi-dominated security forces entered the northern suburban communities of Kamenge, Cibitoke and Kinama under a recently formed security council's orders to end violence between Hutu and Tutsi civilians. Their mission was to disarm certain individual Hutu residents. The army blocked off the entire area and there were reports of exchanges of heavy fire between armed civilians and the army. However, there is mounting evidence -- independent and collaborated -- of the widespread deliberate and arbitrary killing of unarmed victims by the army, simply because of their ethnicity.

Amnesty International expressed its dismay over the government's decision to give the army orders to enter the district, where more than 200 unarmed men, women and children had been extrajudicially executed by members of the security forces just about two weeks earlier. Those previous killings on 6 March 1994 appeared to be a show of strength orchestrated by the army following the refusal by some Hutu civilians in Kamenge to be disarmed by gendarmes, and also appear to have been in reprisal for the reported killing of several gendarmes in an earlier shoot-out with some armed civilians.

Violence and instability racked Burundi when the army seized and summarily executed President Melchior Ndadaye and other senior government and National Assembly officials during a coup attempt on 21 October 1993. Between October and December 1993, up to 100,000 civilians were killed. Many Hutu civilians were executed extrajudicially by the security forces, some of them in reprisal for the killing of Tutsi by Hutu civilians. A Commission of Inquiry set up by the government in December has failed to begin investigating the coup attempt and the killings. By December, more than 700,000 people fled to neighbouring countries and about 250,000 were displaced inside Burundi.

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