

BURUNDI

Time for international action

Since 21 October 1993 the central African country of Burundi has been engulfed in a wave of brutal violence sparked by an attempt to overthrow Burundi's first democratically elected government. The President, four other senior government officials, the wife of the Foreign Minister and the wife of a National Assembly member were killed by members of the armed forces. The coup itself failed but the resulting violence has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of innocent civilians. In addition, more than 700,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries and 250,000 are displaced inside Burundi. Hundreds more are dying from poor conditions in the refugee camps, where many remain, too afraid to go home.

The scale and ferocity of the killings are virtually unprecedented in Burundi and elsewhere. The killings are a result of a persistent struggle between Hutu and Tutsi elite for control of state institutions. Before elections in June 1993, the Tutsi had dominated political life. While the elections changed the political balance, Tutsi remain in control of the armed forces. Hutu challenges to Tutsi domination have repeatedly been followed by largely indiscriminate reprisals by the armed forces against Hutu civilians. Killings of varying scale occurred in Burundi in 1965, 1969, 1972, 1988 and 1991, but this is not an inescapable ethnic conflict; it is a political battle which can be stopped if the will is there.

Those responsible for these killings have never been formally identified or brought to justice. This impunity, which protects the mainly Tutsi security forces, appears to be encouraging the Hutu to take the law into their own hands and carry out reprisal attacks against thousands of innocent Tutsi. These acts of violence have also gone unpunished.

Amnesty International believes that the problem of impunity is one of the main reasons for the ongoing cycle of violence.

To date, international action on Burundi has been alarmingly inadequate.

Amnesty International is appealing to international public opinion to make governments and inter-governmental organizations worldwide respond to the call of the people of Burundi for assistance – immediately.

1. Funeral of assassinated President Ndadaye. Before he was executed on 21 October 1993, President Ndadaye is said to have addressed the soldiers who killed him with the following words:

Mes chers militaires, pensez à ce que vous allez faire.

Il faut qu'on s'entende sur vos souhaits. Pensez à votre peuple, à votre famille. Ne versez pas le sang.

My dear soldiers, consider what you are about to do.

We should agree on your wishes. Think about your people, your family. Do not spill blood.

2. A man, recently returned from refugee camps in Rwanda, walks in his village on the banks of lake Rweru and passes a dead body. The number of civilians, Hutu and Tutsi, killed since the murder of President Ndadaye in October 1993 has been estimated at between 25,000 and 100,000. The actual numbers may never be known.

3. A soldier outside a petrol station in Kibimba, Gitega Province, where as many as 70 Tutsi school children were burned to death by a Hutu gang. Many members of the armed forces and their civilian supporters were jubilant during the first few days of the coup attempt. The atmosphere quickly changed when it became clear the attack had been condemned worldwide and had triggered widespread killings of Tutsi by Hutu government supporters.

The armed forces continue to use equipment obtained from foreign countries against the civilians they are supposed to protect; training provided by some Western governments has certainly failed to change the behaviour of the armed forces, who continue to violate human rights.

4. **Léonce Hantakirutimana** *“The soldiers attacked me with machetes and knives....As I lifted my arms above my head to protect myself, my right hand was cut off by a strike of the machete...I fainted for an instant. My assailants must have thought I had just died because they left me alone.”* A policeman scared off the attackers and took Léonce Hantakirutimana to hospital.

Léonce Hantakirutimana, a twenty-seven-year-old technician in an agricultural research institute, fled to Rwanda when the coup occurred in October 1993, but returned to his home town, Ngozi, on 3 December 1993, thinking the violence would have subsided. He was attacked two days later. He now lives in hiding in the capital Bujumbura.

5. **Sylvie Ntungiyabandi** *“On 29 October....my son was killed. We were still at the displaced persons’ camp in Gashikanwa. About 15 soldiers came and ordered the Tutsi in the camp to collect the Frodebistes (members of FRODEBU, the political party of assassinated President Ndadaye). The Tutsi took 11 Hutu, including my son **Richard Ntahomvukiye** and other men I knew. The soldiers then commanded the Tutsi to kill them....with machetes and clubs while the soldiers stood by”.*

A few hours after arriving at the camp on 22 October, soldiers had taken Sylvie Ntungiyabandi’s husband, **Paul Bavakure**, a local representative of the FRODEBU party. He was

bayoneted to death. Sylvie Ntungiyabandi returned home with her other children to discover all the family's possessions stolen. She will try to carry on the farm with help from her older children.

6. **Vénérende Bucumi** *"On 23 October at about ten in the morning, eight soldiers arrived at our place. They called for my husband, **Etienne Ntahondereye**. As he came out, the soldiers took him and then went to our neighbour's house. There they called for my neighbour, **Léon Philbert**. He came as well. When my neighbour came, the soldiers pointed their guns and shot. After shooting they bayoneted them to death. I've seen it all, I was in front of my house"*.

Vénérende Bucumi was forced to sit on her husband's dead body while soldiers took valuables from her house. Reports suggest that a total of 17 people in Tangara commune, Ngozi Province, where Vénérende Bucumi lived, were killed by soldiers that day. Vénérende Bucumi has been left a widow at the age of 26. She has six children and is expecting another in July.

7. **Issa Ndururutse and other family members** *"On 21 October at eight in the morning about 200 Hutu came down to the market area....Nothing happened at that time, but the same day they started to cut down trees to block the roads....On the 22nd at around six in the evening, I was sitting with my family outside our shop when a group of Hutu walked towards us. We didn't expect anything to happen because all had been quiet before. But suddenly they started to attack us"*.

Issa Ndururutse saw his father, Joseph Miburo, a Tutsi muslim, his brother and his half-brother killed by the Hutu gang. He escaped with the rest of the family to the local police station

for safety. They went to a displaced persons camp but returned home in mid-November 1993. Their shops have all been pillaged and the family has to rely on help from neighbours to survive.

8. **Refugees at Mokino camp, Rwanda** More than 700,000 people have fled from Burundi to neighbouring countries, terrified to return for fear of being killed. Conditions in the camps were so poor that by the end of 1993, humanitarian organizations reported that about 180 refugees were dying daily from exposure, disease and malnutrition. By March 1994, many refugees returned clandestinely to Burundi. But further violence and the threat of famine as people abandoned their farms, forced many to flee yet again. The international community has been slow to respond to appeals for assistance, but if food, seeds and hoes arrive they could be easily distributed.

9. **Burundi refugees in Rwanda raise their fists as a sign of support for FRODEBU, the political party of assassinated President Ndadaye.** It is misleading to portray the violence in Burundi as simply an irrational and therefore inevitable ethnic feud. The conflict is also a political one, a struggle for power. With political will on all sides, respect for human rights in Burundi can be a reality.

What you can do

1. Appeal to your government to fulfil their international obligation to help the people of Burundi

2. Alert others in your country to the human rights crisis in Burundi and ask them to join in this campaign

3. Write to the heads of the army and *gendarmérie* in Burundi appealing to them to take immediate measures to stop the killings

• Chef de l'Etat-major général des forces armées, Ministère de la Défense nationale, Bujumbura, Burundi

• Chef de l'Etat-major général de la gendarmerie, Ministère de la Défense nationale, Bujumbura, Burundi

4. Write to the President of Burundi appealing to him to end the impunity which protects the army and urging him to set up an independent and impartial inquiry into the killings

• Son Excellence le Président, Présidence de la République, BP 1870, Bujumbura, Burundi

*For more information about the current situation in Burundi and Amnesty International's concerns and recommendations, you can read AI's latest report *Burundi: A time for international action* (AI Index no. AFR 16/08/94). This document can be obtained through your local AI office.*