

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 02/12/97

EXTRA 15/97

Fear of refoulement / Fear for safety

5 February 1997

**RWANDA/BURUNDI Thousands of Burundi refugees in Rwanda**

Thousands of Burundi refugees in Rwanda fear forcible return to Burundi following government announcements which suggest they are expected to leave by 5 February.

On 25 January 1996 a high level delegation of Burundi and Rwanda government authorities visited Kigeme camp in Gikongoro prefecture, and Musange transit centre in Butare prefecture, both in southern Rwanda. Among the delegation was the Burundi Minister of Rehabilitation, the Governor of Burundi's Kirundo province and the prefect of the Rwandese prefectures of Butare and Gikongoro.

During these visits the Burundi Minister told the refugees that the situation in Burundi was safe enough for them to return and that mechanisms would be set in place for them to return before 5 February 1997. Refugees were not informed of any alternative options for those who do not want to return.

As of 3 February, there were 1,546 Burundi refugees in Kigembe camp. In Musange transit centre there are around 740 Burundi refugees. Some of these have fled the conflict in eastern Zaire. In addition, there are several thousand Burundi refugees in the prefecture of Cyangugu. Three hundred and ninety-two were forcibly returned from Cyangugu to Burundi on 30 September 1996, despite the fact that refugees who had participated in cross-border visits reported that the situation was not safe.

In early January, the Rwandese Government reportedly announced that all Burundi refugees had to leave Rwanda by 15 January. This deadline was subsequently extended but the situation of the Burundi refugees remains uncertain.

Refugees in Musange transit centre have reportedly been verbally threatened by Rwandese security officials. In at least two instances, Rwandese officials reportedly told refugees that their tents would be burnt in order to make them leave.

Amnesty International fears that those Burundi refugees who do not want to return to Burundi are at risk of being forced back, despite the fact that they face the risk of grave human rights violations including torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In the last few months, there have been numerous cases of *refoulement* of Burundi refugees from Zaire, Tanzania and Rwanda involving thousands of refugees. Several hundred Burundi refugees, forced back from Zaire and Tanzania, have been killed upon return (see Amnesty International Urgent Action EXTRA 172/96 (AFR 16/30/96, 7 November 1996) and follow-ups; EXTRA 179/96 (AFR 16/33/96, 14 November 1996) and EXTRA 03/97, AFR 02/04/97, 14 January 1997). The Burundi refugees in Rwanda are aware of these incidents, which accentuate their fears of return.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reportedly refused to cooperate with the repatriation of refugees to Burundi on the grounds that the situation there is not safe.

It cannot be considered safe for refugees to return to Burundi. Massive human rights abuses continue on a daily basis in most parts of the country, including extrajudicial executions by the security forces and deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed opposition groups. Amnesty International believes that no one should be forced to return to Burundi at the present time.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express or airmail letters in English, French or your own language:**

**To the Rwandese authorities:**

- appealing to them not to forcibly return refugees to Burundi;
- stressing that refugees forcibly returned to Burundi are likely to face serious human rights violations such as torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution;
- appealing to them not to impose arbitrary deadlines for voluntary repatriation, not to allow Burundi officials access to camps, or exert other kinds of pressure on the refugees to return while the situation in Burundi remains unsafe;
- reminding them of their international obligations under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees to protect refugees and not to return them to a country where they will be at risk.

**To the Burundi authorities:**

- urging them to take immediate steps to improve the human rights situation in Burundi to enable refugees to return voluntarily and safely;
- appealing to them to set up mechanisms for monitoring the safe return and resettling of returnees;
- expressing concern that no investigation has been carried out into the extrajudicial executions of hundreds of returnees.

**APPEALS TO:**

Rwandese Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Interior

Colonel Alexis KANYARENGWE

Monsieur le Vice-Premier Ministre et Ministre de l'Intérieur

BP 446, Kigali, République rwandaise

**Fax: +250-84373 / 83374**

**Telegrams: Vice-Premier Ministre, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Vice-Premier Ministre / Dear Deputy Prime Minister**

Rwandese Minister of Rehabilitation and Social Integration

Monsieur Patrick MAZIMHAKA

Ministre de la Réhabilitation and et de l'Intégration sociale

Ministère de la Réhabilitation et de l'Intégration sociale

BP 2034, Kigali, République rwandaise

**Fax: +250-72338**

**Telegrams: Ministre de Réhabilitation, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Secrétaire d'Etat / Dear Minister**

Burundi Minister for Reintegration and Resettlement of the Displaced and Returnees

Madame Anne BARIYUNTURA

Ministre à la Réinsertion et à la Réinstallation des Déplacés et des Rapatriés

**Fax: +257 21 2629**

**Telegrams: Ministre à la Réinsertion, Bujumbura, Burundi**

**Salutation: Madame le Ministre / Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Rwandese Minister of Social Affairs  
Monsieur Pie MUGABO  
Ministre des Affaires sociales  
Ministère des Affaires sociales  
BP 1413, Kigali, République rwandaise

Burundi Minister of Interior  
Mon. Epitace BAYAGANAKANDI  
Ministre de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité Publique  
c/o the office of the President  
**Fax: +257 22 7490**

and to diplomatic representatives of Rwanda and Burundi accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 March 1997.