

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 02/15/97

27 February 1997

Further information on EXTRA 15/97 (AFR 02/12/97, 5 February 1997) - Fear of refoulement / Fear for safety

RWANDA / BURUNDI Thousands of Burundi refugees in Rwanda

On 18, 19 and 20 February 1997, between 1,700 and 1,900 Burundi refugees from Kibangira camp in Cyangugu prefecture (southwestern Rwanda) reportedly returned to Burundi. The exact circumstances and reasons of their return are not clear, but it is feared that they may have returned under duress. For many months, the Burundi refugees in Kibangira camp have been under pressure from the Rwandese authorities to leave Rwanda and have been told that they are not welcome there. Some have been threatened, others ill-treated. It is likely that their return was not voluntary. Given that conditions in Burundi remain dangerous and volatile, Amnesty International is concerned that the returnees are at serious risk of human rights violations, including extrajudicial execution.

Most of the 1,700 to 1,900 refugees have reportedly returned to Burundi's northwestern province of Cibitoke. After crossing the border, they were reportedly escorted by Burundi military officials. As there is no permanent international presence in the region, their fate cannot be adequately monitored. In the past few months, there have been several cases where returnees to Burundi, who have been met or escorted by soldiers, have been tortured, "disappeared" or killed. Cibitoke province continues to be the scene of violence and grave human rights abuses by the Burundi security forces and armed groups. For example, on 12 February 1997, members of the Burundi army reportedly killed 20 people in Cibitoke.

Approximately 2,000 Burundi refugees remain in Kibangira camp in Cyangugu. Their situation is uncertain. Most of them have been refugees in Rwanda since the end of June 1996, having fled massacres in Burundi. On 30 September 1996, 392 were forcibly expelled to Burundi (see UA 234/96).

The Burundi refugees in Musange transit centre, Butare prefecture, and in Kigeme, Gikongoro prefecture (see EXTRA 15/97) are still in the camps there. They remain under threat of *refoulement* and there are increasing fears for their safety. Fears that they may be forcibly returned to Burundi have been heightened by the recent return of the Burundi refugees from Cyangugu and by the fact that international organizations have only a very limited presence on both sides of the border, due to insecurity.

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

To the Rwandese authorities:

- appealing to them not to forcibly return refugees to Burundi;
- stressing that refugees returning to Burundi are likely to face serious human rights violations such as torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution;
- appealing to them not to pressurize any 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 30 March 1997.