

ZAIRE/RWANDA Around 50 Rwandese refugees in Zaire

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of some 50 Rwandese refugees who are at risk of being sent to eastern Zaire or Rwanda. On 28 February 1997, about 43 of them were flown to the northern town of Kisangani and were expected to be transferred to Tingi-Tingi refugee camp in eastern Zaire. About six others are awaiting repatriation to Rwanda.

The refugees are among 54 refugees who were released from custody in the Zairian capital, Kinshasa, where they had been detained, apparently at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), since March 1996. After their release, the refugees sought the protection of the UNHCR. It is unclear whether they themselves demanded to be taken to Tingi-Tingi or Rwanda. Tens of thousands of Rwandese refugees had re-grouped at Tingi-Tingi following attacks on other refugee camps in eastern Zaire by members of the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaire* (AFDL), Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire. However, on 28 February and 1 March, refugees began fleeing Tingi-Tingi and the camp virtually emptied, following threats of an attack there by the AFDL. The camp has since been captured by the AFDL. The Zairian government has claimed that AFDL fighters killed 25,000 refugees in the camp, but the killings have not been confirmed by independent sources.

Amnesty International has received numerous reports of deliberate and arbitrary killings of thousands of Rwandese refugees in eastern Zaire and believes that those deported from Kinshasa would be at grave risk of such abuses if sent to Tingi-Tingi, Kisangani, or other areas likely to be attacked by the AFDL.

Those destined for the Rwandese capital, Kigali, are likely to be arrested and detained by the Rwandese authorities upon arrival. They are also at risk of ill-treatment during arrest or while in detention in harsh conditions amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The approximately 54 refugees had been arrested in March 1996 while in refugee camps in eastern Zaire after being accused of intimidating other refugees and allegedly preventing them from returning to Rwanda. They were subsequently taken to Kinshasa where they were held by the Zairian security services. They were released on 18 and 25 February 1997. They were detained for nearly one year without charge or trial. They are not known to have been charged with any offence. The accusation of "intimidation" has sometimes been used in Zaire and Tanzania as a pretext for arresting refugee leaders who were known to have expressed reservations about the prospect of return to Rwanda and to have stated that they did not believe it was safe for refugees to return to Rwanda - a message which ran contrary to the efforts of the governments hosting them and of the UNHCR who tried to encourage voluntary repatriation throughout 1995 and 1996.

Massive human rights abuses have been taking place in eastern Zaire since the conflict broke out there in October 1996, causing many refugees and local populations to flee. Hundreds of thousands of Rwandese refugees returned to Rwanda in November 1996. However, the human rights situation in Rwanda continues to give cause for concern: arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment, detention in life-threatening conditions, "disappearances" and killings have

increased since the end of 1996. Many returnees have been among the victims of these abuses. Those known to have played a leadership role in the refugee camps in Zaire are likely to be especially at risk.

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

To the Zairian authorities:

- asking for information on the whereabouts of the approximately 43 Rwandese refugees who were flown to Kisangani on 28 February and asking for guarantees for their safety;
- expressing concern at reports that they were destined for Tingi-Tingi refugee camp which has since been occupied by the AFDL, amidst reports of killings of some refugees in the camp;
- expressing fears for the safety of some six other refugees awaiting repatriation to Rwanda;
- stressing the grave risks of human rights violations which refugees may face in eastern Zaire or Rwanda;
- appealing to the Zairian authorities to ensure that the refugees are protected and that they are not forcibly sent to parts of Zaire or Rwanda where they may be subjected to human rights abuses.

To the UNHCR:

- expressing concern at reports that approximately 43 Rwandese refugees were flown to Kisangani on 28 February 1997 destined for Tingi-Tingi refugee camp, apparently in the presence of UNHCR officials;
- asking the reasons for sending refugees to areas where they are at risk of human rights abuses;
- stressing the grave risks of human rights violations which they may face in Kisangani, Tingi-Tingi or Kigali;
- appealing to the UNHCR to ensure that the refugees are protected from human rights abuses in Zaire and that they are not forcibly returned to Rwanda.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

Monsieur Léon Kengo Wa Dondo
Premier Ministre
Hôtel du Conseil exécutif
Kinshasa-Gombe
République du Zaïre

Telegrams: Premier Ministre, Kinshasa, Zaire

Fax: +243 884 2062

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre / Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Interior

Monsieur Mwando Simbi
Ministre de l'Intérieur
Hôtel du Conseil exécutif
Kinshasa-Gombe
République du Zaïre

Fax: +243 884 2062

Telegrams: Ministre de L'Intérieur, Kinshasa, Zaire

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

UNHCR

Monsieur Hubert Edongo
Délégué du HCR
UNHCR
Kinshasa
République du Zaïre
Fax: +1 407 726 5004 / +873 175 4443

COPIES TO:

Minister of Justice
Monsieur Thibwabwa Ashila Pashi
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des sceaux
Ministère de la Justice
BP 3137, Kinshasa - Gombe, Zaïre
Fax: +243 884 3778 (if voice: "je voudrais envoyer un fax")
Telegrams: Ministre Nsinga, Kinshasa, Zaire

and diplomatic representatives of Zaire accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 April 1997.