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RWANDA: HUMAN RIGHTS MAY BE THE MAIN CASUALTY OF TENSIONS IN THE
RWANDESE GOVERNMENT

Human rights could be the main casualty of tensions in the Rwandese government, Amnesty International said today, following this week's resignation and dismissal of five members of the Rwandese government after they criticized human rights violations by the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA).

"We are concerned that supporters of the RPA -- and members of its political wing the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) -- appear increasingly unwilling to accept measures to prevent further human rights violations by the RPA," the human rights organization said.

"All individuals concerned about the human rights situation in Rwanda should be allowed to express their opinions without fear of reprisal."

Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu and Minister of the Interior Seth Sendashonga resigned from their posts on 28 August 1995. Both officials cited disputes within the government about the state of insecurity in Rwanda as one of the main reasons for their resignation. The Prime Minister also referred to apparently deliberate and arbitrary killings of unarmed civilians committed by elements of the RPA.

Their resignation was followed by the announcement on 29 August of the dismissal of Alphonse-Marie Nkubito, Minister of Justice, Jean-Baptiste Nkuliyingoma, Minister of Information, and Immaculée Kayumba, Minister of Transport.

These resignations and dismissals have occurred at a time of heightened political tension in Rwanda and neighbouring countries. On 29 August, following a temporary suspension of forcible returns of refugees from Zaïre, the Zairian authorities threatened to resume the forcible return of Rwandese and Burundi refugees if voluntary repatriation by the United Nations is not completed by the end of 1995.

Fears that the safety of Hutu refugees would not be guaranteed in Rwanda are likely to be accentuated by reports that the five officials left the government partly because they sought to put in place measures to prevent the RPA from violating the rights of refugees.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the restrictions imposed on the Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu following his resignation. On the evening of 28 August, telephone lines to his home were cut and there were military roadblocks on the roads leading to and from his house. Communication was resumed on 30 August but it is not yet clear whether Faustin Twagiramungu has been granted freedom of movement.

Amnesty International is appealing to Rwandese President Pasteur Bizimungu to ensure that all individuals are allowed to express their opinions without fear of being subjected to human rights violations.

The organization is also appealing to the Rwandese government once again to create the necessary conditions to encourage refugees to return voluntarily and to protect them upon their return. This must include transparency about the true human rights situation in the country and action to bring the perpetrators of human rights violations to justice.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International reiterates its deep concern at threats of further forcible return of Rwandese and Burundi refugees from Zaïre and is appealing to the Zaïrian government to refrain from sending back any more refugees against their will. The organization encourages the UN and individual foreign governments to continue pursuing negotiations with the Zaïrian authorities to avert further mass *refoulements* which could lead to large scale human rights abuses in the region.

BACKGROUND:

For several months, Rwandese government officials who have criticized the domination of the government by the RPF or who have denounced the interference of the army in political affairs have become increasingly marginalized; some have been subjected to threats and harassment. In June 1995, Jean-Damascene Ntakirutimana resigned from his post as chief adviser to the Prime Minister in protest at the policies of the RPF and its reluctance to address human rights violations, and the problem of the return of Rwandese refugees.

In March 1995, Rwanda's state prosecutor François-Xavier Nsanzuwera fled Rwanda for Belgium; he had been repeatedly threatened after denouncing human rights abuses and thwarted in his attempts to prevent further abuses.

Amnesty International is concerned about a similar pattern of victimization of local government officials who have spoken out against human rights abuses, several of whom have been killed. For example, Placide Koloni, *sous-préfet* (sub-regional administrator) of Ruhango sub-prefecture and a member of the *Mouvement démocratique républicain* (MDR), Republican Democratic Movement, the party to which the Prime Minister and the Minister of Information belong, was killed in his home along with his wife and two young daughters and servant on 27 July 1995.

The regional administrator of Butare prefecture, Pierre-Claver Rwangabo, was killed on 4 March 1995. The government has announced inquiries into these incidents but has so far failed to announce the results of its inquiries or to bring to justice those responsible for these killings.

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