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OAU SUMMIT: THE WORST IS STILL TO COME IN BURUNDI IF HUMAN RIGHTS ARE IGNORED

Yaounde -- Amnesty International representatives attending the 64th Council of Ministers Meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), being held in Yaounde, Cameroon from 1-5 July 1996, are urging African States to take concrete measures to stop the massive human rights violations occurring in Burundi.

“Hundreds of civilians, both Tutsi and Hutu, are being killed each week in Burundi by the military and armed groups,” Amnesty International said. “Unless the OAU provides bold leadership to the international community, the situation will continue to deteriorate rapidly. The worst could still come.”

The worldwide human rights organization is pleased that Burundi is receiving priority attention at this meeting. In his report to the session, the Secretary-General of the OAU, Dr Salim A. Salim, underscored that the present situation in Burundi is very alarming. At the same time a meeting of concerned states in the Great Lakes region is considering Burundi's request for security and humanitarian assistance.

“The Council of Ministers should note that all past peace initiatives have failed because they did not address human rights issues,” Amnesty International said. “It is essential that violations of human rights which are guaranteed in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights are addressed for any conciliation efforts to succeed.”

“There can be no permanent solution to the conflict unless effective steps are taken to end human rights violations, investigate past violations and bring those responsible to justice.”

It is the failure to address these issues in the Great Lakes region, and also in other African countries, that has resulted in the increasing figure of nine million refugees and internally displaced people in the African continent. The lack of serious guarantees against extrajudicial executions, torture, “disappearances” and unfair trials has prevented the millions who have fled from returning to their homes.

The urgency of the situation in Burundi requires this meeting of the OAU to provide clear guidance to the international community by recommending concrete measures which may be taken by the United Nations and its member states to put an end to the massacres. These recommendations should include:

- Measures to guarantee the impartiality of the security forces and the judiciary, and to enable the judiciary to institute impartial investigations into human rights violations;
- The monitoring of military security and police transfers to armed groups and government forces, to ensure that they do not contribute to further human rights abuses, and to use their influence to stop supplies or transfers which may be used to commit human rights violations;
- A guarantee that everyone has equal access to the law and accused persons receive prompt and fair trials;
- A guarantee that all allegations of collusion between government forces and armed groups to commit human rights violations are rigorously investigated and that irregular paramilitary forces are disbanded;
- The public release of the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry into the assassination in October 1993 of former President Melchior Ndadaye and the massacres which followed;
- Any political settlement should be based on human rights protection, including a commitment to institutional reform aimed at creating a solid human rights framework; and
- The European Union should urgently provide the funding it has promised to enable the number of UN human rights monitors to be increased from the current five.

Amnesty International exhorts member states of the OAU to prove their commitment to find lasting solutions to the Burundi crisis by actively participating in and providing personnel and other resources for any human rights initiatives undertaken by the UN.

“The situation in Burundi is a challenge to the credibility and effectiveness of the OAU and the United Nations,” the organization said.

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