

UA 112/98 Refoulement / Fear of refoulement / Fear for safety 9 April 1998**GREAT LAKES Hundreds of Burundian and Rwandese refugees refouled from DRC**
Thousands of Burundian and Rwandese refugees in eastern DRC

At least 200 Burundian and around 140 Rwandese refugees could be in serious danger following their *refoulement* from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which began on 5 April 1998. Thousands of refugees who remain in the DRC may also be at risk of being forcibly expelled to Burundi or Rwanda where their lives may be at risk.

The *refoulement* operation was carried out by soldiers of the Congolese national army, the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL), Alliance for Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaïre, who commandeered trucks from humanitarian organizations to transport the refugees to the border.

Most of the *refouled* Burundian refugees had reportedly come to the DRC after fleeing the bordering Burundian provinces of Bubanza, Cibitoke and Bujumbura rural since the beginning of 1998. The conflict in Burundi, between the Tutsi-dominated security forces and predominantly Hutu armed groups, is currently concentrated mainly in the eastern part of the country including these provinces. The Burundi government has apparently stated that the refugees *refouled* from the DRC should return to their places of origin in Burundi.

The Rwandese refugees, who were *refouled* from the area north of Uvira in eastern DRC, were reported to have been taken to a transit camp in southern Rwanda. Around 40 Rwandese refugees and four Congolese nationals who were also expelled to Burundi have since been returned to DRC. Reports indicate that refugees in the DRC are still being moved on foot by Congolese soldiers towards the Burundian border.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Along with other unarmed civilians, returning Burundian refugees risk being deliberately and arbitrarily killed by Burundian government forces or armed opposition groups, often in reprisal for alleged activities or presence of Hutu dominated armed groups. While the conflict in Burundi is currently concentrated in the east, human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests and "disappearances" committed by the security forces occur routinely throughout the country including in areas to which returnees may be forced to go.

The human rights situation in Rwanda continues to deteriorate. Thousands of unarmed civilians have been killed since the beginning of 1997, some by soldiers of the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA), others by armed opposition groups. Many refugees who have been forcibly returned from neighbouring countries have become victims of extrajudicial executions or disappearances.

In early November 1997 at least 2,500 Burundian and Rwandese refugees were *refouled* from eastern DRC to Burundi and Rwanda in a concerted military operation involving Congolese, Burundian and reportedly Rwandese soldiers who, alongside local Congolese authorities, systematically searched out Burundi and Rwandese refugees in villages around Uvira in eastern DRC. The refugees were apparently accused of belonging to the DRC armed group *Mayi Mayi*, or the Rwandese *interahamwe* militia, and told they had to leave.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in French or your own language:
To the DRC authorities**

- expressing concern at the *refoulement* of at least 200 Burundian and up to 140 Rwandese refugees from DRC since 5 April 1998 and calling for the *refoulement* to be stopped;
- seeking assurances that refugees will be allowed to remain in DRC or a third country if they so request and that they will not be forcibly returned to Rwanda or Burundi, where their lives may be at risk;
- expressing concern for the safety of Rwandese and Burundian refugees who remain in DRC, and seeking assurances that the refugees will be protected from human rights abuses in DRC.

To the Burundian authorities (Please note: Mail is still not getting through to Burundi)

- appealing for refugees not to be returned to the areas in Burundi from which they have fled and where their safety cannot be guaranteed.

To the Burundian / Rwandese authorities (as appropriate)

- calling for the safety of refugees already returned or expelled to Burundi/ Rwanda to be guaranteed and for international humanitarian and intergovernmental organizations, such as the UNHCR and UN human rights monitoring operation, to be allowed access to those refugees who have already returned;
- calling for immediate steps to be taken to address the human rights violations which are the root cause of the refugees' flight.

APPEALS TO:

Democratic Republic of Congo

Head of State, Son Excellence Laurent-Désiré KABILA, Président de la République
Présidence de la République, Kinshasa-Ngaliema, Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: Président, Kinshasa, DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear President

Minister of the Interior , Monsieur Gaëtan KAKUDJI

Ministre de l'Intérieur, Kinshasa-Gombe, Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: Ministre Intérieur, Kinshasa, DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Burundi

President, Major Pierre Buyoya, Président de la République

Présidence de la République, Burundi

Telegrams: Major Buyoya, Bujumbura, Burundi

Faxes: + 257 22 7490

Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear President

Minister for Reintegration and Resettlement of the Displaced and Returnees

Monsieur Pascal NKURUNZIZA, Ministre à la Réinsertion et à la Réinstallation des
Déplacés et des Rapatriés, Ministère à la Réinsertion et à la Réinstallation des
Déplacés et des Rapatriés, Burundi

Faxes: + 257 21 82 01

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Rwanda

Adviser to the President and Chair of the Committee on Repatriation

Dr Ephraïm Kabaija, Adviser to the President and Chair of the Committee on
Repatriation, Office of the President, BP 15, Kigali, Rwanda

Faxes: + 250 84769

Salutation: Monsieur Kabaija / Dear Mr Kabaija

Minister of the Interior

Sheikh Abdul Karim Harelimana

Ministre de L'intérieur, du développement communal et de la réintégration sociale,
BP 446-Kigali, Rwanda

Faxes: + 250 84373 / 83374

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 May 1998.