

Burundi: Between hope and fear

In a report published today, Amnesty International appealed to all parties in Burundi's civil war to immediately halt deliberate killings of unarmed civilians and to act responsibly to prevent a slide into human rights catastrophe.

*Amnesty International's report, *Burundi: Between hope and fear*, paints a deeply disturbing picture of the inexorable rise in killings of unarmed civilians, "disappearances", torture, arbitrary arrests and massive population displacement. The report also looks at the legal protection the peace agreement should provide, and argues that "without justice, there can be no future accountability, and no long term security."*

Since the signing of the Arusha peace agreement on August 28 2000, violence has escalated leaving hundreds of civilians killed. "Signature of the peace agreement has in no way changed patterns of human rights abuse in Burundi," the organization said. "However, whatever its shortcomings, the peace agreement represents a key moment in Burundi's political history which could serve as an opportunity to break decades of violence and impunity."

The peace agreement, which is yet to come into force, represents the best opportunity in recent years to ensure better respect for human rights in Burundi. It provides a framework to acknowledge and investigate past human rights abuses and to reform and strengthen institutions such as the judiciary and armed forces.

"The alternative of continued and escalating conflict, of generalized violence and further human rights crisis, must be avoided at all costs", said Amnesty International. "The hundreds of incidents of human rights

abuses and violence since August underline the desperate need to find a solution to Burundi's precarious situation."

Recommendations

The Amnesty International report calls on all parties in the conflict to:

take immediate action to prevent further unlawful killings of unarmed civilians;

investigate allegations of human rights abuses made by the security forces and armed opposition groups, and bring the perpetrators to justice;

stop recruiting children or forcing them to perform work in support of the military or armed opposition operations;

undertake reforms to ensure a functioning and impartial legal system ;

protect the rights of internally displaced persons and refugees;

guarantee that employees of humanitarian and human rights organizations are not threatened, arrested or killed, and can freely carry out their work.

The report also calls on the international community to use their political influence and financial resources to support programs to promote and protect human rights in Burundi. "The ability of the Government of Burundi and inter-governmental agencies to implement these recommendations will be seriously diminished without the support of key donor agencies," Amnesty International added. "We also urge the international community to recognize and support the key role which national human rights groups play in defending human rights."

\ENDS

public document

Note to editors

The audio-visual media team at Amnesty International has a short video on Burundi available for broadcast use in English and French. "Caught in the Crossfire: The Struggle for Human Rights in Burundi" covers the following issues: population displacement, prison conditions, deaths in custody, 'disappearances' and torture.

Please, note that certain copyright conditions apply. To order copies, please contact World Images:

Tel: 00 44 117 930 4099

Fax: 00 44 117 930 4088

e-mail: world.images@worldtelevision.com

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>

\ENDS

public document