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## **Great Lakes: hundreds of civilians killed in the spiral of violence in Burundi**

Large scale killings of unarmed civilians by the Burundian army and armed opposition groups have continued in 1998, Amnesty International writes in a report launched today, adding that few of those responsible have been arrested and brought to justice.

While the world's eyes have been focussed on events in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), massacres of civilians have continued in Burundi, virtually ignored by the international community, Amnesty International said.

"Soldiers of the Tutsi-dominated Burundian army have deliberately killed this year alone hundreds of men, women and children - virtually all of them Hutu. The various Hutu-dominated armed opposition groups and other militias active in Burundi have killed scores of unarmed civilians", the organization adds.

The main target of the Burundian army has been the Hutu civilian population, in particular in the southern provinces of Makamba and Bururi and from the province of Rural Bujumbura. "The majority of the killings have taken place in areas of armed conflict, making access to and verification of information particularly difficult", Amnesty International says. Most of the killings have taken place in reprisal for insurgent activity.

On 3 November 1998, soldiers killed at least 165 people in the Mutambu *commune* in Rural Bujumbura. The Ministry of Defence finally acknowledged on 10 November that some killings had taken place and put the figure at around 30. It announced an investigation. The local administrator acknowledged the deaths of more than 70 people. "Although the exact circumstances of the massacre are not yet clear, the victims are reported to have been shot or bayoneted to death", Amnesty International's states

Amnesty International has also received reports of detainees being executed in detention by government. For example, on 31 January 1998, four days after his arrest, Léopold Baraunyeretse was shot as he tried to escape from the army. No official investigation is known to have taken place. On 1 July 1998, five people were executed by police in a cell in Mutaho commune several days after their arrest. They had been accused of collaborating with armed opposition groups.

"Torture and ill-treatment of detainees is rife in Burundi, particularly in police and military custody. Many testimonies indicate that wealthy Hutu have been particularly vulnerable to arbitrary arrest on the accusation of financially supporting armed opposition groups", the report says.

Recent cases of torture include three men who were severely tortured in September at the *Documentation Nationale*, National Intelligence Unit, following their arrest. They had been accused of collaborating with armed opposition groups.

Many cases of rape by the Burundian army have been reported. In March 1998 alone, “hundreds of women and young girls, including children under the age of 10, were raped in regroupment camps in Bubanza Province.”

The organization remains concerned at the continued existence of regroupment camps, despite the closure of some of them. Human rights violations continue in these camps as does the forcible relocation of the local population in some parts of the country. Hundreds of people have been killed during the regroupment operations, houses have been destroyed, crops burnt and farming activities greatly reduced. “Conditions in the camps continue to be appalling with high levels of disease and malnutrition,” the report states.

Armed opposition groups have also been responsible for many human rights abuses in Burundi, including the killings of scores of unarmed civilians. Some of the killings appear to be reprisal or punishment killings of alleged collaborators or potential informants of the government.

Armed opposition groups have continued to attack camps for the displaced. In October 1998, at least 50 people were killed in an attack on a camp for displaced in Bubanza and in an attack near the capital, Bujumbura. These attacks were attributed to the *Front pour la libération nationale* (FROLINA), Front for National Liberation. Five people were also killed in another attack on a camp for the displaced in August in Bubanza province. Civilians have also been killed or ill-treated for refusing to cooperate with a particular group. None of the armed opposition groups currently active in Burundi acknowledged responsibility.

The refugee crisis is becoming more acute as decades of violence and gross human rights abuses have caused massive population displacement. “In addition to the approximately 600,000 people who are now reported to be internally displaced, there are now 300,000 Burundian refugees in neighbouring countries in the Great Lakes region,” Amnesty International says.

“Refugees in Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya and the DRC have been forcibly returned to Burundi or threatened with expulsion, despite the fact that many of them are likely to be at serious risk of human rights abuses on their return. The government of Burundi has also taken part in the military operations to forcibly repatriate Burundian refugees from the DRC”.

In the document Amnesty International makes several recommendations to the parties to the violence in Burundi. In particular it asks the government to “issue strict orders preventing further deliberate killings of unarmed civilians or disproportionate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians”. The organization recommends the leaders of armed opposition groups to “instruct all combatants to abide by international humanitarian law, in particular Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions that specifically prohibits all parties to an internal conflict from targeting people taking no active part in the hostilities.”

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