

AI INDEX: AFR/47/26/98

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001 HRS GMT 23 JUNE 1998**

## **Rwanda: "Disappearances" and killings continue on a daily basis**

In the last few months, the number of "disappearances" in Rwanda has reached such a level that many families no longer even try to let the authorities know that their relatives have "disappeared", Amnesty International said in a report issued today.

At the same time the armed conflict has worsened-- fuelled in part by the ready flow of arms into the country-- leading to the deliberate killings of thousands of unarmed civilians by both government soldiers and armed opposition groups.

The report, based on research carried out in Rwanda earlier this year, shows that the dramatic escalation in the number of dead and "disappeared", which started after the return of refugees at the end of 1996, is continuing to this day-- and warns that unless the authorities take action to turn the tide of violence it risks becoming an inevitable part of life in Rwanda.

Large-scale "disappearances" have occurred as soldiers of the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) have carried out mass arrests in the northwest. Many others, especially those from the northwest, have "disappeared" after identity checks in the capital Kigali. These people may be detained in military camps, but it is impossible to verify their whereabouts, because access to these camps is strictly denied. Their families wait without news for months on end.

Jean-Pierre Sibomana, a judicial police inspector, was detained at a military camp in Ruhengeri in February. Reports indicate that he was subsequently taken from the detention centre and shot dead, although he was reportedly registered as having been released. Evariste Twagirumukiza was arrested on 13 May in Kigali by armed men in military uniform and was taken away in a vehicle belonging to the local gendarmerie. He has not been seen since.

Emmanuel Munyemanzu, a journalist, "disappeared" in Kigali on 5 May. In March, he had been suspended from his duties at Rwanda's national television station, following a dispute with the director of the government-controlled Rwandese Information Office.

"Not all 'disappearances' can be directly attributed to the authorities, but the government has a responsibility to investigate," Amnesty International said. "Yet investigations appear to be the exception, rather than the rule."

Even where investigations have been launched - as in the case of the "disappearance" of the prosecutor of Gisenyi in January 1998 - the results have not been disclosed and no one has been brought to justice.

Thousands of unarmed civilians have been killed since December. The violence has spread from Gisenyi and Ruhengeri in the northwest to the central region of Gitarama. Some of the killings were committed by RPA soldiers, others by armed opposition groups believed to include members of the former Rwandese army, others by unidentified assailants.

“In Rwanda, there is no room for neutrality,” Amnesty International said. “ Civilians are likely to be killed by both sides, each suspecting that they are cooperating with the other.”

The picture projected by the media is heavily influenced by government control over information and is often misleading. Attacks attributed to armed opposition groups sometimes receive extensive publicity, but killings of civilians by RPA soldiers are rarely reported.

Despite international condemnation of the proliferation of small arms in the region, the RPA and armed opposition groups continue to obtain new supplies of weapons and equipments, which they have used to commit violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

Companies in Israel - using Eastern European links -, China and South Africa supplied weapons or military equipment to the former Rwandese armed forces before and during the genocide of 1994. Companies from these same countries have continued to supply arms and equipment to the RPA, sometimes arranged through companies in third countries. Armed opposition groups appear to have also obtained weapons with relative ease - despite the continuing UN embargo on the former Rwandese army - apparently through networks of trafficking and through close alliances with armed opposition groups operating in neighbouring countries.”

Many unarmed civilians have been killed during military operations in the northwest, and the victims include the most vulnerable groups. On 12 May, around 150 people, including elderly people and young children, were reportedly killed during a military operation in Giciye, in Gisenyi. In the same month, RPA soldiers surrounded several areas in Gatonde in Ruhengeri and killed scores of unarmed civilians.

Killings by armed opposition groups have also escalated. In an increasing number of incidents, Tutsi and Hutu have been killed without distinction. People suspected of collaborating with the authorities have been targeted - such as Charles Komeza, one of nine people killed in Nyabikenke, in Gitarama, at the end of March. In late December, around 28 members of three families were killed in Nyakinama and a further nine in Nkuli, both in Ruhengeri.

Censorship, insecurity and contradictory reports can sometimes make it difficult to identify the perpetrators. On 13 May, a number of civilians, including several elderly people, were killed in Nyamutera, Ruhengeri, by unidentified armed men.

In May, the Rwandese authorities suspended the activities of the UN Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda (UNHRFOR), pending a review of its mandate. The government has been putting pressure on the operation to drop its monitoring work.

“The Rwandese Government should allow the UNHRFOR to remain in Rwanda and fulfill all its current tasks, including monitoring and reporting on current human rights abuses,” Amnesty International said. “ These functions are critical to establishing transparency and commitment to human rights in Rwanda.”

Amnesty International is urging foreign governments to recognize the true nature of the current human rights situation in Rwanda, to publicly denounce the grave abuses committed not only by armed opposition groups, but also by the security forces, and to use any influence they have to try to prevent further abuses. Foreign governments should also prevent any further supplies of light weapons and associated other types of military equipment to either the Rwandese security forces or armed opposition groups operating in Rwanda, as long as such equipment is likely to contribute directly to further human rights abuses. ENDS.../