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**BURUNDI: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DELEGATES RETURN FROM BUJUMBURA WITH REPORTS OF KILLINGS FOLLOWING COUP LAST WEEK**

Two Amnesty International delegates have just returned from Burundi, with new information about widespread killings following a bloody coup attempt there last week.

The two delegates, Godfrey Byaruhanga and Franca Sciuto, were trapped in the capital Bujumbura after a faction of the military attempted to wrest power from the first democratically elected government in Burundi's history. Within hours, the soldiers involved in the coup had murdered President Melchior Ndadaye and several other key government ministers and leaders of the National Assembly - new information from Bujumbura suggests that they were probably tortured and strangled to death in the barracks of the 11th Battalion, the prime movers behind the coup attempt. Soldiers also shot dead the wife of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was holding a three-month-old baby in her arms, because her husband had fled.

While in Bujumbura, the Amnesty International team also received information about widespread killings by both civilians and soldiers in the provinces, and reports of further assassinations and shootings in the capital itself. Soldiers are also reported to have extrajudicially executed several provincial governors and other local government officials recently appointed by the Ndadaye government.

Amnesty International is now greatly concerned at the increasing violence in Burundi's countryside, with defenceless civilians being killed on account of their ethnic origin. The army, composed predominantly of members of the Tutsi minority, has in the past carried out indiscriminate killings of unarmed civilians belonging to the Hutu majority. President Ndadaye was himself a Hutu, and his death is reported to have sparked revenge killings by Hutu armed with weapons such as machetes and spears targeting Tutsi, as well as killings by armed Tutsi soldiers and civilians of Hutu.

Said Godfrey Byaruhanga: "Very soon after the coup, we heard reports of killings in the provinces, of Hutu civilians taking up arms and killing their Tutsi neighbours. The coup was seen as yet another episode in the historic cycle of violence by the Tutsi military against the Hutu - and this time the Hutu reacted with violence themselves.

"The Tutsi-dominated military were also carrying out reprisal attacks, murdering Hutu and those they perceived as supporting Hutu across the country. In some cases, soldiers were killing Hutu civilians to defend Tutsi civilians under attack, but all too often they were killing apparently out of revenge or no motive other than the decades of inter-ethnic bloodlust which have shaped Burundi's post-independence history."

The military was also responsible for serious human rights violations in the capital, where the Amnesty International team heard reports of assassinations and killings of peaceful demonstrators. Soldiers are reported to have murdered people in the night, targeted because they were Hutu or Tutsi supporters of Hutu leaders.

In an almost unprecedented demonstration of public opposition to the coup, demonstrators took to the streets to protest about the coup and the murders almost immediately. The military reacted with predictable violence, reportedly opening fire on the unarmed, peaceful demonstrators, killing at least 10 people. Despite this, the demonstrations continued - after a week, numbers had swelled from a few hundred to several thousand, all protesting peacefully despite the potential threat to their own safety.

Since the coup on 21 October, Amnesty International has repeatedly called for an end to the killings and for all those responsible for human rights violations to be brought to justice. Ironically, the day before the coup, Amnesty International had launched a major international campaign against political killings and "disappearances", calling them the major threat to human rights in the world today.

With these new reports of widespread killings, Amnesty International is repeating its call, and urging the government, which appears to be slowly regaining control of the country, to do all it can to ensure that human rights are respected in the future and to bring an end to the violence in Burundi.

The latest killings occur just four months after Burundi's first-ever presidential elections brought President Ndadaye to power, ending years of political domination by the Tutsi minority, after a four-and-a-half year long process of reforms to bring about national reconciliation. Ironically, these included the adoption in March 1992 of a new constitution designed to prevent any repetition of the massacres and inter-communal killing which have scarred Burundi's past.

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**Note to editors**

**Godfrey Byaruhanga** is a staff member of Amnesty International's International Secretariat, where he is the research expert on Burundi and neighbouring countries Rwanda and Zaire.

**Franca Seluto** is a lawyer and former Chairperson of Amnesty International's International Executive Committee. She is currently Chairperson of the Rainforest Foundation.

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