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News Service 13/94

AI INDEX: AFR 16/WU 02/1994

EMBARGOED FOR 0001 HRS GMT 27 JANUARY 1994

BURUNDI: THE SITUATION THREE MONTHS AFTER THE ATTEMPTED COUP

On 21 October 1993 mass intercommunal killings, committed by both civilians and the army, were sparked off by soldiers from the Burundi army when they tried to overthrow the government. During the coup attempt President Melchior Ndadaye and other senior government and National Assembly officials were killed.

Humanitarian organizations working in Burundi estimated that by the end of December 1993 more than 100,000 people had been killed and thousands more injured. To date, in the intercommunal violence, more than 700,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries and about 250,000 are reported to be displaced inside Burundi.

At the beginning of January month humanitarian organizations reported that about 180 refugees were dying daily from exposure, disease and malnutrition. Although the wave of killings had abated by the end of 1993, sporadic killings by civilians and soldiers were still being reported in January 1994.

Despite international level decisions to carry out an inquiry into what happened and to deploy forces in Burundi, virtually no action has yet been taken and Amnesty International fears that hundreds or thousands more killings may occur. The human rights organization is calling on the international community to take action to help prevent further killings and other human rights abuses and to encourage reconciliation and a return to law and order in Burundi.

As soon as news of the coup attempt became public, members of the majority Hutu ethnic group, from which the government draws most of its support, began attacks on members of the minority Tutsi ethnic group. The killings were widespread and indiscriminate. Burundi's army is composed largely of Tutsi, who dominated the country until elections last June. Expecting army reprisals, Hutu blocked roads and destroyed bridges. This slowed the progress of the army and for many days thousands of Tutsi were slaughtered. In some areas killings of Tutsi only stopped when the army arrived and began its own round of killings.

There have been reports that some Hutu local government officials either participated in or condoned the killings. On 22 October a local government

official in Muruta commune, Kayanza province, reportedly organized the execution of 90 Tutsi and one Hutu member of the former ruling party at Murangara trading centre.

In the slain President's home province, Muramvya, a local government official reportedly ordered Tutsi to cut trees and block roads. The Tutsi were then killed together with Father Basile Samoya, a Catholic priest of Munanira parish, who had tried to prevent the killings. At Ntita in Gitega province a Hutu mob reportedly attacked a local medical centre, killing a doctor. They then launched an assault on Tutsi sheltering in a nearby church, killing at least 30.

Once news of the widespread killings of Tutsi became known, members of the armed forces dispersed into the provinces both to protect Tutsi and to carry out reprisal attacks on Hutu.

At the end of October 1993 soldiers went on the rampage in several zones of Gitega town and were supported by Tutsi civilians in identifying Hutu homes. One hundred or more Hutu were killed in Gitega by soldiers using bayonets, guns, grenades and light armoured cars. In the town's Nyamugari zone those extrajudicially executed included Bruno Bashingwa, a cooperative society employee. A Protestant pastor, Bonaventure Ndorimana, was among those extrajudicially executed in Nyabugogo zone. On 24 November a soldier shot dead the governor of Kirundo province. On 28 December soldiers launched an assault on Hutu living in Bugarama, a suburb of the capital Bujumbura, and killed five. Many others fled the area.

Around 22 October Tutsi students at a secondary school (lycée) in Ruyigi town went on a rampage around the town, killing at least 70 unarmed Hutu civilians including women and children. The Gendarmerie district commander for Ruyigi province reportedly distributed weapons to the students. For three days the students and other Tutsi attacked Hutu civilians, including those who had taken refuge in the compound of Ruyigi cathedral. Those killed included a Catholic priest and other members of the local clergy and a seminarian, Albert Rukarambuzi. The Governor of Ruyigi reportedly tried to stop the killings but was himself arrested by the Gendarmerie commander and detained for a week.

The rural areas of Burundi generally appear to be partitioned between Tutsi in army-guarded displaced peoples' camps, and Hutu hiding to avoid military reprisals. Refugees in neighbouring countries are facing suffering and death. The host countries are themselves suffering from severe human rights crises of their own, political instability and even famine.

Amnesty International believes that the spate of mass killings, perpetrated by both sides in the conflict, is a result of the absence of durable measures to prevent tragedies of this magnitude. There are signs that the world is again beginning to forget about the human catastrophe as the international media scale down reporting on the killings and their consequences. Amnesty International is now appealing to the international community to stop turning a blind eye to the disasters which have occurred in Burundi.

After the coup collapsed in late October, surviving government ministers who had taken refuge in the French Embassy, moved in November to a hotel

pending further guarantees for their security. The government has said it cannot trust the army for protection, despite assurances given by army commanders. At the start of December the government, which has insisted that those responsible for the coup attempt and the subsequent killings must be brought to justice, set up a commission of inquiry. The commission has apparently failed to begin its work because opposition parties identified with Tutsi and military interests claim it would be biased in favour of the government and that they would prefer an international commission of inquiry.

The government asked the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to send a military force to Burundi to protect remaining members of the government and prevent further killings. It also requested the UN to send an international commission of inquiry to Burundi. The UN has agreed to send civilian observers, including a five-person team to investigate the coup attempt. The UN Secretary General appointed Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, a Mauritanian former minister of Foreign Affairs, as his special representative to Burundi.

The OAU has announced that it will send 180 soldiers and 20 civilians to constitute an International Force for Stabilization and Confidence Building, apparently mainly financed by the UN. The OAU Secretary General appointed a Senegalese Ambassador Papa Louis Fall as his representative in Burundi. The role which the UN and OAU representatives will play in preventing further human rights violations remains unclear. No forces have yet been dispatched to Burundi by the UN or OAU apart from the two individual envoys, and the five-person investigation team is not known to have arrived in Burundi yet.

On 13 January 1994 the National Assembly elected former Minister of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Cyprien Ntaryamira, as President of the Republic. A new government is expected to be appointed shortly.

Amnesty International is appealing to the international community to urge world governments and intergovernmental organizations to take action to help promote reconciliation and the establishment of a durable peace in Burundi. Amnesty International urges governments and international organizations in particular to:

- Hold discussions with the government, political parties, civil society and the security forces to assess ways in which they can be helped to come together and find a way out of the current crisis.
- Open discussions involving the government and opinion leaders in Burundi to establish why the commission of inquiry set up by the government was rejected by the opposition and agree to appropriate standards so that this or another commission can start investigations promptly.
- Assist the government to set up a commission of inquiry with full powers to investigate human rights abuses which occurred during the coup attempt and its aftermath; reveal the full facts about the initial killings at all levels of the army and, if appropriate, outside it; as well as to establish the responsibility, if any, of government ministers or others associated with the ruling party for ordering or encouraging killings. The commission should also investigate the responsibility of the army high command either

in Bujumbura or at local level for ordering or allowing killings of unarmed civilians and establish the responsibility of any other group or groups for promoting or carrying out acts of violence from 21 October onwards. The commission's conclusions should be used to bring to justice those alleged to be responsible for human rights abuses. The commission's terms of reference should include making recommendations on measures required to prevent massacres in future.

- As a minimum step, to ensure that any officials holding government office or in the security forces who are suspected of ordering or participating in killings should be removed from any post in which they could allow such gross violations of human rights to occur again.

- Assist the people of Burundi and their government to implement recommendations of the commission of inquiry on measures to prevent a repeat of massacres in future, including training for the security forces and Burundi citizens in respect for human rights.

- Respond to appeals for urgent humanitarian assistance for Burundi refugees in neighbouring countries or the displaced inside Burundi, particularly by providing food, shelter, sanitation and medical care.

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