

BURUNDI

Leaders are changing, but human rights abuses continue unabated

Amnesty International is concerned that the Burundi military authorities are continuing to disregard human life as they have done for many years, especially since October 1993. Although the new Burundi military leader, Major Pierre Buyoya, said, soon after taking power on 25 July 1996, that he wanted to stop genocide in Burundi, massacres by government forces and armed groups are continuing unabated.

The Burundi military's long record of human rights violations

The Burundi armed forces, which are dominated by members of the Tutsi ethnic group, have a 30-year history of massacring several hundred thousand unarmed civilians, mostly members of the majority Hutu ethnic group. After Major Buyoya took power in a previous coup in September 1987, government forces massacred thousands of civilians -- 5,000 according to the government and as many as 20,000 according to other sources -- in northern Burundi in August 1988. A group of educated Hutu who blamed the massacres on government forces and demanded an independent inquiry were detained for several months and subjected to torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. At least 1,000 more were massacred in Bujumbura and Bubanza provinces in late 1991. The Burundi Government rejected appeals by Amnesty International and other human rights groups to allow independent and impartial inquiries into these massacres which the authorities blamed mostly on Hutu rebels. At the end of 1991 and early 1992 several hundred Hutu were detained and many of them were ill-treated. Some of them were sentenced, in grossly unfair trials, to death, life imprisonment and other prison terms after Tutsi-dominated courts found them guilty of involvement in killings of Tutsi.

Reports of massacres carried out since the coup d'état

Reliable sources in Burundi have informed Amnesty International that members of the security forces have continued to commit extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations since the coup d'état, despite Major Pierre Buyoya's announcement that he would stop killings. In other cases government forces have assisted or condoned killings of Hutu civilians by Tutsi. For example on 24 July 1996 the Hutu population of Kigabiro, Gahororo and Gasenyi in Mbuye commune, in Muramvya province, were surrounded by military deployed in four columns coming from Gasura, Kirehe, Rutegama and Mbuye. Eye-witnesses report that many victims were burned to death as they were trying to hide in the bush. Those who came to bury the victims on 25 July were attacked with machine guns by soldiers. Two hundred corpses had been identified by 29 July, as some reports indicated that further attacks against the population of Nyakararo were carried out by armed forces coming from Kiganda and Gashingwa.

On 25 July Tutsi students of the *Institut supérieur d'agriculture* (ISA), Higher Agricultural Institute, in Gitega killed 30 of their Hutu schoolmates. As the massacre took place the school premises were surrounded by members of the security forces who reportedly stopped and killed other Hutu students who tried to escape. Some of the students were burned in their mattresses with their property. Those killed include Fabien Buyana, Jean-Claude Ndayizigiye and Léonidas Ntayizaniye, Marie-Rose Nshimirimana, Imelda Ntakiyiruta, Désiré Sindayikengera, Mathilde Ncahoruri and Valérie Nimbesha. Ten other students have "disappeared."

On 26 July at least 110 unarmed Hutu civilians were killed by government forces in Carama, in Mutimbuzi commune, near the capital, Bujumbura. An eye-witness told Amnesty International that soldiers cordoned the village and asked those who were not involved in fighting government forces to come out. Few of the village's residents went towards the army positions. Many hesitated because in previous instances people who had gone towards the army as a sign of innocence had been extrajudicially executed. The army moved into the village and killed many of those who had remained there, mainly using bayonets. Those who tried to run were shot with machine guns and other automatic weapons.

On the night of 26 July in Giheta, in Gitega province, an attack by Hutu rebels on a coffee factory at Muremera resulted in reprisal attacks by government forces on civilians in the area. Government forces surrounded the nearby villages of Gisarara and Gihamagara on Gisagara hill (*colline*) and killed at least 150 people. Soldiers also burned many houses in the area.

On the same night at Rusengo High School in Ruyigi province two Hutu students were killed by Tutsi schoolmates and soldiers and Tutsi students threw grenades into the dormitory of Hutu students in Rumonge High School, in Bururi province, killing one student and injuring 12 others. The deputy Principal of the school reportedly refused to carry the injured students to hospital.

Also on 26 July, in Mabanda High School, two Hutu students were killed while others were ordered by Tutsi students to vacate the school as they were now "back in power".

On 25 July, in Bugendana, in Gitega province, members of the armed forces extrajudicially executed at least 18 people. Among the victims were a primary school teacher, known as Bernadette, her mother-in-law and two other people who were living with her.

Since 25 July 1996, at least 100 people are reported to have been killed by soldiers in Shumba and 26 in Kibogoye, on Bukeye hill, in Muramvya province. On 29 July houses were seen burning in the area after raids carried out by government forces.

Since 25 July there have been reports of summary executions by the army in Mutimbuzi commune, north of Bujumbura. Daily mass arrests of young Hutu in Rubirizi and Mubone suburbs of Bujumbura generally end in extrajudicial executions. At least 60 corpses were left on the road to Muzinda up to 29 July. They were later removed by military trucks.

On 27 July, at least seven people "disappeared" after they were reportedly abducted by security forces in Kanyosha, near Bujumbura. Their whereabouts are unknown. There are fears that they may have been killed. Those who "disappeared" were reportedly on a list of people sought by the security forces. It is unclear what they are accused of.

On 29 July soldiers reportedly killed an unknown number of people, including women and children, in Giheta, in Gitega province. Those too weak to run away drowned in the nearby Ruvyironza river. Among those killed were Rosata Cimpaye, Anne Cimpaye and Veronica Cishikaye and her three children.

On 30 July, Amnesty International received reports that killings of Hutu by the armed forces were still going on in Mashitsi, near Gitega.

On 1 August the military authorities announced that government forces had killed an unspecified number of Hutu soldiers who they claimed had deserted the army. The alleged deserters were former bodyguards of members of the deposed government. Circumstances of these killings remain unclear. A source in Bujumbura has claimed that no deserters were killed, but instead soldiers looking for the deserters killed a teacher and his three children on Nyambuye hill near Bujumbura's Kamenge suburb. Amnesty International is concerned about reports that unarmed civilians were extrajudicially executed, and that alleged deserters may have been extrajudicially executed because of their loyalty to members of the ousted government.

Continuing impunity for members of the security forces

Military authorities who have been presiding over human rights violations for years, including recent months, continue to head the security forces. Many of these were implicated in the October 1993 coup attempt which sparked off a wave of massacres by civilians and government forces. As many as 150,000 people, most of them civilians, have been killed since 1993. It has been reported that a United Nations (UN) Commission of Inquiry set up in August 1995 to investigate the assassination of former President Melchior Ndadaye and the massacres which followed has implicated some of the military authorities. There is speculation that the 25 July coup d'état was timed to prevent a publication of the Commission of Inquiry's report and to prevent those implicated from being brought to justice. Earlier in 1996 a Burundi military court ruled that soldiers who had been arrested in connection with the October 1993 coup attempt had no case to answer and they were freed. In the meantime, more than 6,000 civilians, mostly Hutu, are still in custody in connection with the massacres carried out after the coup attempt. Amnesty International is urging the UN to promptly publish the Commission's report and recommendations to ensure that the international community takes appropriate measures to bring an end to impunity and human rights abuses which continue to fuel political violence in Burundi.

Amnesty International's appeal for measures to stop the massacres and other human rights violations

Amnesty International is appealing to all parties to the conflict in Burundi and to the international community to recognize the unacceptable scale of human rights abuses which are continuing in Burundi. These abuses, including numerous extrajudicial executions by the security forces, have continued since the coup d'état of 25 July, despite Major Pierre Buyoya's announcement that he intended to put an end to killings.

Political and military leaders in Burundi on all sides should fulfill their promises to respect human rights. As proof of their commitment to human rights, they should give public instructions to those under their command to refrain from killing unarmed civilians and remove those accused of responsibility for such abuses from positions in which they are likely to repeat them. They should facilitate independent

investigations into killings such as those described above, and adopt measures to bring those responsible to justice, in fair trials which exclude the death penalty.

They should also stop forced repatriation of Rwandese refugees as this is a blatant disregard for the internationally recognized principle of *non-refoulement*.

Foreign governments, mediators in the Burundi conflict and inter-governmental organizations such as the Organization of African Unity should ensure that human rights are placed at the top of their agenda when addressing Burundi's latest crisis. Any measures taken to try to resolve the crisis should be based on an honest and independent assessment of the current human rights situation and should not be influenced by short-term political considerations. In particular, the result of the UN Commission of Inquiry into the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye and the massacres which followed should be made public without delay, to reveal the truth behind these massacres - the consequences of which are being felt to this day - and to end the impunity protecting the perpetrators. Failure by the UN to publicize the report of the Commission of Inquiry would be tantamount to collusion with those in Burundi who are seeking to conceal their role in organizing, perpetrating or condoning massive human rights abuses and encouraging them to continue human rights crimes.