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THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF BURUNDI

ISSUE

The political crisis triggered by the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993 has deteriorated into ongoing civil unrest. Respect for human rights has suffered accordingly.

BACKGROUND

Former President Pierre Buyoya (a Tutsi) broke with the tradition of *coups d'état* which brought him and his two predecessors (also Tutsis) to power. He set in motion a political reform process which sought to reconcile the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority and culminated in elections for the presidency and the national assembly in June 1993. These were fully free and fair and resulted in the election of a Hutu president and Hutu-dominated national assembly. Hardline elements in the army, possibly encouraged by ex-president Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, refused to countenance the army's sudden and complete loss of power and staged an abortive coup, in which President Ndadaye and members of his government were killed. A wave of massacres ensued, first killings by Hutus avenging the dead president, then reprisals by the Tutsi-dominated army. Altogether, between 50,000 and 80,000 died. Ndadaye's successor, Cyprien Ntaryamira, died in the attack on Rwandan President Habyarimana's aircraft, on April 6, 1994.

The current president, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, replaced Ntaryamira on an interim basis, being confirmed in office only after the negotiation of the Convention on Government of September 10, 1994. Driven by the Rwandan example of what could happen to an unprotected minority, the Tutsis sought substantial protection: among other things, the convention shifted key powers of the president to a National Security Council and provided that 45% of the ministerial posts would be granted to the Tutsi party, UPRONA. Still, Tutsi hardliners refused to be content and undermined the government through general strikes and violence by Tutsi militias. In ten days of violence in March 1995, the Tutsi militias cleared many districts in Bujumbura of their Hutu residents.

Led by former Interior Minister Léonard Nyangoma, the Hutu militias, with support from the former Rwandan army based in Zaire, have conducted an insurrection which has spread from border areas near Zaire. The northern provinces are in a state of civil war and acts of sabotage have drastically reduced electric and water supplies to the capital. The army has failed to suppress this unprecedented challenge; neither it nor its adversary are conducting efficient operations and much civilian blood is being and will be shed (civilian deaths are averaging about 1,000 per month).

President Ntibantunganya, a moderate Hutu, declared a state of emergency in June 1995, in an attempt to suppress the insurrection and confirm the principle of power-sharing. He has been deserted by many nationalist Hutus for having conceded too much to the army and by

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