

December 1993

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BURUNDI

ISSUE

The attempted coup d'état which resulted in the death of President Ndadaye on 21 October 1993 triggered a wave of ethnic massacres that resulted in over 100,000 deaths, in addition to causing 800,000 Burundians to take flight for the neighbouring countries and rendering 200,000 homeless within the country. These atrocities represent one of the worst examples of human rights violations of our time. The excesses of the putschists were also responsible for interrupting a democratic process that could have served as a model not only for Central Africa but for the whole continent.

BACKGROUND

The assassination of President Ndadaye, by rebel elements within the army, gave rise to massacres of Tutsis (15% of the population, but quite evident in the army) by the Hutus of the interior, seeking to avenge themselves of the death of their elected leader, the country's first-ever Hutu President. The army, seeking to protect the Tutsi ethnic minority in the interior, used their superior weaponry against the Hutus, the peasant element of which, although apparently under solid leadership, had only machetes and spears as weapons.

Although the worst part of the massacres was short-lived, they did not end completely until December 6, 1993, the day of the President's funeral. This was also the first time that members of the government ventured forth out of the hotel that it was using as its shelter. The situation has quietened down but remains very tenuous. The authorities have appealed to an international protective force, but the UN Security Council, which has just undergone some difficult experiences in Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia, is no longer prepared to deploy forces for extended periods of time. In November, the Security Council issued a presidential statement calling on the Secretary-General to designate a small team to facilitate efforts of Burundi and the OAU to resolve the crisis. For its part, the OAU is prepared to deploy an African force, but needs logistical and financial support. The power vacuum that has prevailed since the attempted coup does not lend itself to the restoration of the climate of confidence required for the return of the refugees and displaced persons.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada strongly condemned the attempted coup on the very day that it occurred. It has distributed \$3 million in humanitarian aid to assist the refugees in the neighbouring countries, and the displaced persons in the interior. However, Canada is aware of the urgent need to establish a climate of security to protect the devastated populace, and to enable the refugees and displaced persons to return safely. With this in mind, it has asked its Ambassador accredited to Burundi to representations to the Prime Minister.

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