

General

Burundi was administered by Belgium under a UN trusteeship arrangement until 1959, when internal autonomy was granted. It became independent in July 1962. It is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa, as well as one of the poorest in the world. Landlocked and dependent on routes through its Kenyan and Tanzanian neighbours for supplies, the country has only limited natural resources. Deeply rooted ethnic conflicts between the Hutus (the majority) and the Tutsis (the governing minority) have occasionally degenerated into widespread violence against the Hutus, and this has slowed down the social and economic progress of the country considerably.

Political and Economic Situation

The current president of Burundi, Major Pierre Buyoya, took power after overthrowing Colonel Bagaza while he was attending the 1987 Francophone Summit in Quebec. Since then, he has consolidated his position and has made visible efforts to promote peaceful relations between the Hutus and Tutsis. He has also adopted measures to heal the deep religious rifts caused by the anti-church policies of his predecessor.

Most of the people of Burundi are farmers. Services and industry are negligible. Government developmental efforts are concentrated on import substitution and on exports of a few selected products to compensate for the decreasing ability of coffee to generate much-needed foreign exchange resources. Burundi, which depends heavily on foreign aid to balance its budget, has been successful in attracting substantial loans from multilateral and bilateral sources.

Foreign Relations

Burundi's external relations are essentially non-aligned. The country has good relations with France and Belgium and has regular contacts with Libya. Relations with Zaïre, strained under Bagaza, have improved. Relations with Tanzania have also been consolidated in order to block attempts by the opposition to use Tanzania as a base for attacks against the Burundian regime.