

An impartial legal system is nonexistent. Flagrant violations of human rights include non-compliance with limits on how long a person can be detained in custody, preventive detention in the absence of formal accusations, non-compliance with legal arrest procedures, and abuse during interrogations. Prisons are overcrowded, with poor health and living conditions.

Economic sanctions imposed by regional leaders have resulted in a deterioration in living conditions for the general population, without affecting those in power. Essential subsistence goods (e.g. food and fuel) are prohibitively expensive. The region's heads of state maintain that the purpose of the sanctions against Burundi (imposed in the wake of the coup d'État), including a total trade embargo, is to force President Buyoya to open a true dialogue with all the parties to the conflict. The lifting of sanctions was announced at the meeting of heads of state that took place in Arusha on January 23, 1999.

CANADA'S POSITION

Canada supports the efforts made by countries in the region to restore constitutional order to Burundi. Accordingly, Canada supports the regional leaders' choice of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere to act as a facilitator.

Any humanitarian assistance must bring relief to all sectors of the population, without discrimination or exclusion. Canada insists that its humanitarian activities do not influence the political workings and manoeuvres surrounding the regional peace process.

At the 54th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Canada did not co-sponsor the resolution to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for Burundi, although it voted in favour. We feel that the resolution was not sufficiently severe with regard to the abuses committed by the government. A small UN mission on human rights is present in Burundi, but its ability to monitor the situation effectively is limited by security considerations.

Canada remains deeply concerned by the continuing hostilities and civil war, as well as by the state of human rights in Burundi. Canada maintains that a Burundian military solution to the political crisis is not a viable option. A diplomatic approach, enabling all Burundians to negotiate and achieve a peaceful solution, offers the only chance of improving the situation.

Canada supports and is prepared to contribute to a regional conference that would examine peace and security issues in the African Great Lakes region.