

BURUNDI

ISSUE

Although negotiations are under way as part of the Arusha regional peace process, clashes continue between government and rebel forces. These confrontations remain one of the main causes of flagrant human rights violations.

BACKGROUND

Burundi President Pierre Buyoya installed a **reconciliation government** in June 1998 with the appointment of FRODÉBU members to government positions.

The third round of negotiations within the framework of the **Arusha regional peace process** took place in late October 1998. During these negotiations, chairs and deputy-chairs were proposed for four of the five committees which will be looking into the following questions: the nature of the conflict; democracy and good governance; peace and security; reconstruction and development; and implementation of the negotiated agreement. Canadian Carolyn McAskie, Vice-President of Multilateral Programs for CIDA, was appointed vice-president of the Commission on reconstruction and development.

Meetings were held to examine the situation in Burundi in Ottawa on August 20, 1998 and New York on January 11, 1999. Both were chaired by Canada, with the latter co-chaired by the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) of the UN Secretariat and the UNDP. These meetings were held prior to Arusha III and Arusha IV, respectively, and were aimed at mobilizing the international community and encouraging the **Burundians to continue to participate actively in the regional peace process**. At the Ottawa meeting, donor countries reached agreement on a broader definition of humanitarian assistance for Burundi, one that included direct assistance for development. The New York meeting strengthened this definition.

Ethnic violence and armed confrontations between government forces and Hutu (and now Tutsi) rebels are the main source of human rights violations. Assassinations, disappearances and torture remain widespread. The civil war rages on and continues to be very brutal. The situation is becoming all the more precarious with the involvement of the Burundian forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the alliance between the Hutu rebels and the Kabila Government. The latter is alleged to have supplied the rebels with arms.

While the attacks by Hutu rebels have left numerous victims, the **army is also excessively brutal** in its struggle against the insurgents and sometimes simply in retribution for the popular support shown the rebels. Fleeing the conflicts, hundreds of thousands of Burundians have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, especially Tanzania.

In its efforts to put down the rebellion, the government had ordered large segments of the rural population to live in **resettlement camps** to prevent them from collaborating with the insurgents. In the face of international criticism, Burundi now maintains it has dismantled the camps and is allowing the "resettled" residents to return to their communities (but not necessarily their communes). Apparently, the camps still exist but on a voluntary basis; camp life is characterized by sickness, malnutrition, and unsanitary living conditions.

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