Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR’s Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

BDI106059.FE

Burundi: Treatment of people born of mixed Hutu-Tutsi couples by members of these two groups; state protection (2016-January 2018)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Mixed Couples

The information in the following paragraphs comes from an article on mixed couples in Burundi that was published in 2016 by Yaga, [translation] “a collective of Burundian bloggers who are striving to change mindsets” [1] (Yaga n.d.a):

[translation]
In the last four decades, the history of Hutus and Tutsis has been marked by civil wars and massacres, and the divides that set in made it impossible for two people from different ethnic groups to marry. But among the new generations in Burundi, ideas are changing.

A 28-year-old Burundian Tutsi woman, a banker in Bujumbura, who wanted to marry a Hutu businessman but was met with a refusal from her mother. Among the young woman’s family members, her brothers and cousins supported the young woman, while aunts, uncles and grandparents supported her mother. [translation] “Another complication: [the Hutu businessman] formerly fought with the Hutu rebels. ... In short, he was an ‘tormentor’ of Tutsis. The family [of the Tutsi banker] lost several of family members in the civil war that broke out in 1993.” When the Tutsi banker’s brothers found out, [translation] “they all abandoned her,” and she was forced to end her engagement to her fiancé.

[translation]

[T]he Hutu-Tutsi dispute is increasingly being relegated to the past by the new generations. It is no coincidence that [the Tutsi banker] received support from her brothers and cousins but not from her uncles and aunts. With the signing of the Arusha peace agreements in 2000, which brought an end to the civil war between the Hutu rebel movements and the regimes long characterized as Tutsi, tensions eased. The debate on ethnic discrimination is no longer a taboo unlike in earlier years. Hutus and Tutsis are now represented in institutions. In the game of politics, the ethnic card comes into play less often. This explains the lack of attachment to ethnic membership among young people, who, unlike their parents, were spared from the horrors of ethnic discrimination. (Yaga 18 Aug. 2016)

Researcher Angela Muvumba Sellström, at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at the University of Uppsala in Sweden, a specialist on Burundi with 15 years of experience researching peace and security in Africa, wrote the following in May 2015 in an article published on Mats Utas’s blog [2], which deals with conflicts, peace and security in Africa (Mats Utas n.d.):
Burundi appears to have broken with its past. ... [T]he Arusha agreement and its subsequent cease-fires and post-war developments have created a new Burundi that transcends ethnicity. ... People have always intermarried, but now it seems to be even less problematic. Civil society members who share [Burundian president] Nkurunziza’s ethnic background oppose his third-term. Tutsis and Hutus joke with me about their ethnicity when I tiptoe around it. They don’t care about that anymore. Burundians say that the problem of today is not ethnicity. The problem is the CNDD-FDD [National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie - Forces de défense de la démocratie), the governing party]. (Mats Utas 11 May 2015)

2. People Born of a Mixed Couple

Information on people born of mixed Tutsi-Hutu couples in Burundi was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A historian, director emeritus for research at the National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, CNRS) [3], who is affiliated with the African Worlds Institute (Institut des mondes africains, IMAF) [4], is associated with the Africas in the World research centre (LAM) [5] and has worked on the Great Lakes Region in East Africa since 1965, provided the following information in correspondence with the Research Directorate:

[translation]

In old Burundian society, membership by lineage, clan or “category” (the meaning of the word ubwoko which observers translated as “race” until the 1990s, before opting for "ethnic group") was passed down through the father. Children identified with their father’s ethnicity. In other words, the child of a Hutu father and Tutsi mother was Hutu; the child of a Tutsi father and Hutu mother was Tutsi. There were no “mixed” categories. (historian 29 Jan. 2018)

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a researcher whose areas of research include conflicts and the Great Lakes Region, said that, from his personal point of view, [translation] "since Burundi is a patriarchal society, it is the father’s ethnicity that defines ethnic belonging" (researcher 28 Jan. 2018). Corroborating information could not found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to sources, President Nkurunziza had a Hutu father and Tutsi mother (researcher 28 Jan. 2018; ARTE 12 Nov. 2015).

2.1 Treatment of People Born of Mixed Couples

Information on the treatment of people born of mixed couples in Burundi could not found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. State Protection

Information on state protection available to people of mixed origin could not found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The article published in August 2016 by Yaga originally appeared on Waza, a platform where young people from the African continent can freely express themselves on topics such as politics and human rights (RNW n.d.). Yaga receives [translation] "logistical support from Dutch radio network RNW” through Waza (Le Monde 14 May 2015). Yaga has been mentioned several times in various European media (Yaga n.d.b).

[2] Mats Utas primarily focuses on conflicts and post-conflict situations in West Africa; he has conducted research in Liberia and Sierra Leone and has written about conflicts in Mali, Central African Republic and Nigeria (Mats Utas n.d.). He is a professor and head of the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology at the University of Uppsala (Uppsala Universitet n.d.).


[5] LAM [translation] “is affiliated with the CNRS and Sciences Po Bordeaux. It brings together political scientists, anthropologists, economists, geographers, historians and literary experts” (LAM n.d.). [translation] "LAM examines globalization as it concerns the Africas in a comparative and cross-cutting approach. It focuses on issues relating to politics, its expressions and productions” (LAM n.d.).

References


Historian, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS). 29 January 2018. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate.


Researcher. 28 January 2018. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.


Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Associate professor in anthropology, specialist in the social, cultural and psychological aspects of war, genocide and mass violence; International Crisis Group – Director, Central Africa Projects; Ligue burundaise des droits de l’homme (Iteka); professor, specialist in Burundi; researcher in residence, specialist in public and criminal international law, whose thesis deals with the concept of ethnic cleansing.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; BBC; Bujumbura News; Deutsche Welle; ecoinet; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l’homme; Freedom House; The Guardian; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; Iwacu; Jeune Afrique; Radio France internationale; United Kingdom – Home Office; United Nations – UN News Centre, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Refworld; United States – Department of State; Université Laval – Aménagement linguistique dans le monde.

Tips on how to use this search engine.