

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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](#).

14 March 2017

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Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda: Activities of Burundian militias in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Uganda, including relationship with Burundian refugees (2015-February 2017)

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1. Overview

According to the UNHCR, as of 31 October 2016, there were 180,786 Burundian refugees in Tanzania, 29,975 in Uganda, 30,205 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and 81,307 in Rwanda (UN 2017). According to a report on the Burundi crisis prepared by the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) in collaboration with Ligue ITEKA, a Burundian human rights NGO created in 1991 that focuses on the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IRRI n.d.) [1], some Burundians have also found refuge in Kenya, South Sudan, and Sudan (FIDH and Ligue ITEKA Nov. 2016, 31). An article by *The Guardian* reports that Burundians found shelter in Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda (*The Guardian* 14 Oct. 2015).

The Guardian reports that many Burundian refugees "cited their fear of the Imbonerakure" (14 Oct. 2015). Similarly, sources indicate that Burundian refugees in Rwanda have fled from the Imbonerakure, which means "the foresighted" in the Kirundi language (*La Croix internationale* 5 June 2015; *The New Times* 4 June 2015). Sources describe the Imbonerakure as a "pro-government militia" (*The New Times* 4 June 2015) or "a militia group that supports President Nkurunziza's bid for a third term" (*La Croix internationale* 5 June 2015). However, *The Guardian* describes the Imbonerakure as "the youth wing of the CNDD-FDD [Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces de défense de la démocratie (National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy)] ruling party" (14 Oct. 2015). *Foreign Policy* (FP) magazine describes them as "Burundi's version of the Hutu youth militias responsible for the Rwandan genocide" (FP 4 Nov. 2016). For more information on the Imbonerakure, see Response to Information Request BDI104343 of March 2013.

Daily Nation, a Kenyan newspaper, cites Burundian refugees in Kenya as stating that the "Imbonerakure militia group has been targeting exiles" (*Daily Nation* 22 May 2016). Similarly, *The Guardian* cites a Human Rights Watch researcher as saying that "a widespread and well-documented fear of reprisal attacks among Burundian refugees [in Tanzania and other countries where they have found refuge] is testament to how extensive the terrifying violence inside [Burundi] has become" (15 Apr. 2016). The Human Rights Watch researcher also indicates that the refugees in these countries are "'very worried about their security even outside Burundi'" (*The Guardian* 15 Apr. 2016).

2. Activities of Burundi Militias

The FIDH and Ligue ITEKA report states that,

[translation]

Burundians in exile told our organizations how they were, and continue to be, hunted by Imbonerakure and Burundian intelligence agents in the countries where they sought refuge, often with the complicity of men belonging to local militias. Numerous interlocutors confirmed that Imbonerakure operate permanently in Burundi's border countries: Rwanda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo, but also in more distant countries such as Uganda or Kenya, Sudan and South Sudan. (Nov. 2016, 58).

According to the report,

Imbonerakure are specially sent out of Burundi, by order of the Burundian authorities, with the mission to kill certain identified individuals: political opponents, Burundian civil society members, journalists, protestors, victims who could provide information on the abuses they have suffered. (FIDH and Ligue ITEKA Nov. 2016, 58).

The same report adds that there have been "[s]everal attacks in refugee camps, notably in Tanzania, [which were] were committed by men suspected of being Imbonerakure" (FIDH and Ligue ITEKA Nov. 2016, 31). *The Guardian* similarly reports that Burundian refugees in neighbouring countries say that "teams of thugs [linked to the government militias] are slipping out of Burundi and into refugee camps in neighbouring countries to launch murderous attacks on exiles" (15 Apr. 2016). The same source similarly states that, according to "some" Burundian refugees,

they are being targeted to prevent them from sharing their accounts of abuse in a country hovering on the brink of civil war, where thousands have been abducted, tortured, raped and killed. Others believe they are being singled out by people who want to punish family members active in the opposition. (*The Guardian* 15 Apr. 2016)

According to Radio publique africaine (RPA), a Burundian radio station [2], [translation] "a hunt against Burundian refugees in the East African Community appears to be happening," with Burundian refugees in Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya being [translation] "the most targeted" (RPA 20 Jan. 2016). According to the same source, as of January 2016, in the East African Community countries [Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi], [translation] "five [Burundian refugees] have been assassinated and others tortured" (RPA 20 Jan. 2016). The same source adds that [translation] "emissaries from the Bujumbura regime" have been sent to these countries to identify [translation] "potential opponents" (RPA 20 Jan. 2016). FIDH and Ligue ITEKA similarly state that exiled Burundians they interviewed reported that they were victims of assassination attempts by men who they suspected were Imbonerakure or agents of the of the SNR [Service national de renseignement (Burundian National Intelligence Service)], and who spoke Kirundi, Burundi's official language, at the moment of the attack (Nov. 2016, 59).

The FIDH and Ligue ITEKA report indicates that Jean de Dieu Kabura, an exiled member of the MSD [Mouvement pour la Solidarité en Développement, an opposition party (*Daily Nation* 22 May 2016)] was killed in Nairobi, Kenya, by a young man who was suspected of being an Imbonerakure leader (FIDH and Ligue ITEKA Nov. 2016, 59). The *Daily Nation* similarly reports that Jean de Dieu Kabura was found with stab wounds in Kawangware (22 May 2016). RPA reports that in December 2015, two Burundian refugees were killed, including Jean de Dieu, in Nairobi, and another man in the Kakuma refugee camp (RPA 20 Jan. 2016). The same source adds that the Imbonerakure are accused of killing Burundian refugees, and that the Burundian government has reportedly sent [translation] "emissaries to identify potential opponents" (RPA 20 Jan. 2016). According to the FIDH and Ligue ITEKA report, some Burundian refugees have also been victims of assassination attempts in Uganda and South Sudan (Nov. 2016, 31). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Foreign Policy cites an advocate at Refugees International (RI), an NGO that advocates for the human rights of displaced persons (RI n.d.), as saying that "Burundian agents and militia have blocked would-be refugees from fleeing the country - even arresting them, and physically or sexually abusing them at the border" (*FP* 4 Nov. 2016). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.1 Situation in Tanzania

Al Jazeera reports that "refugees from Burundi, who fled violence in their country to neighbouring Tanzania, have accused their government of sending armed men into refugee camps to hunt down opposition supporters" (Al Jazeera 5 Feb. 2016). Al Jazeera also reported that "several" refugees interviewed in the Nduta refugee camp had indicated that "dozens of Burundians had left the camp in November [2015] in the belief they would join an armed rebel group back in Burundi[;]... [t]hey later learned it was [a] trap set by

government-backed armed groups," and that "people in Burundi had since told them most members of the group had been killed" (5 Feb. 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

RPA reports that, also in November 2015, Burundian refugees were attacked near the Nyarugusu refugee camp by assailants that the refugees claimed came from Burundi, and who were targeting the camp (20 Jan. 2016). According to RPA, the Tanzanian police arrested six Burundians trying to return to Burundi following the attack and seized a gun and ammunition (20 Jan. 2016). The same source also reports that, on 31 December 2015, a Burundian refugee in the Nduta refugee camp died after being beaten and stabbed, and that the following week another Burundian refugee was also stabbed (RPA 20 Jan. 2016). The same source indicates that Burundian refugees in the Nduta refugee camp accused the Imbonerakure of coming from Burundi to commit crimes against the refugees (RPA 20 Jan. 2016). RPA adds that several Imbonerakure were arrested and that weapons were seized in the area around the Nduta refugee camp (20 Jan. 2016). Al Jazeera similarly states that refugees in the Nduta refugee camp reported that "Burundi had dispatched agents who carried out attempted killings and abductions" (5 Feb. 2016).

The Guardian reports that in the Nyarugusu refugee camp there is an "overcrowded secure area" that is fenced off and only accessible to "verified residents" (15 April 2016). The same source adds that although "[a]id workers and experts say they have no evidence that Burundian militias are operating inside Nyarugusu or other camps, [this secure area] is evidence that some vulnerable residents are considered to be at critical risk from attackers inside the camp" (*The Guardian* 15 Apr. 2016). The *Foreign Policy* article states that the Imbonerakure "have been regularly crossing the border into western Tanzania to surveil and intimidate refugees," and that a Tanzanian official who oversees the Nyarugusu refugee camp "acknowledges the group's presence" (*FP* 4 Nov. 2016). According to the *Foreign Policy* article, "[o]nce in Tanzania, [the Imbonerakure] surveil the refugee population, issue death threats, and beat and harass Burundians" (4 Nov. 2016). According to the same source, "[t]he Imbonerakure have also infiltrated aid agencies and nongovernmental organizations in the camps" (*FP* 4 Nov. 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.2 Situation in Uganda

According to RPA, the security of Burundian refugees is threatened in Uganda (20 Jan. 2016). The same article describes the case of a Burundian woman in Uganda who said she was [translation] "almost kidnapped a second time" in January 2016 in Kampala, after having been attacked in October 2015 in the same city, by the same Imbonerakure who had targeted her in Burundi before she fled, and that the person who was with her at the time of the 2016 attack was hurt with a knife (RPA 20 Jan. 2016). The same source also reports the following incidents in the Nakival refugee camp:

- A man was seriously wounded by attackers whom "sources in the camp" link to the Imbonerakure, while a friend who was with him at that time was able to escape, but then had to leave the camp, while his wife who stayed behind, was bullied and forced to leave the house she had in the camp by the camp's neighbourhood leader;
- A woman had to flee the camp for fear of her safety, as two of her four kids were kidnapped, for which she holds the Imbonerakure responsible (RPA 20 Jan. 2016).

RPA indicates that, according to the Burundians who report having been attacked, [translation] "the Ugandan police does absolutely nothing to protect them" (20 Jan 2016). A Burundian refugee in Uganda interviewed by the International Crisis Group stated that 13 Imbonerakure had been discovered in the Nakivale refugee camp but that camp authorities had not yet taken action after being informed (International Crisis Group 25 Oct. 2016). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The FIDH and Ligue ITEKA report states that many Burundian refugees they interviewed in Uganda said that they had received phone calls both from well-known Imbonerakure members and anonymous callers (Nov. 2016, 59). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.3 Situation in Rwanda

Sources report that Rwanda's Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs assured Burundian refugees in the Mahama refugee camp in Rwanda of their security (*The New Times* 4 June 2015; *La Croix internationale* 5 June 2015), saying that "the camp was secure and would not be infiltrated by militia groups" (*La Croix internationale* 5 June 2015). An article in Rwandan newspaper *The New Times* cites Burundian refugees in the Mahama refugee camp as saying that "some members of [the] Imbonerakure and [Burundian] state operatives had crossed the border into Rwanda posing as refugees" and claimed they had

seen them in the Mahama refugee camp (4 June 2015). RPA stated that [translation] "emissaries" from Bujumbura have gone to Rwanda to track regime opponents, but that, as of January 2016, no cases of assassination attempts or human rights violations against Burundian refugees had been reported (20 Jan. 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that the Burundian government accuses the Rwandan government of recruitment for rebel groups in refugee camps, including Mahama (RFI 25 Nov. 2015; France24 4 Nov. 2015). The Al Jazeera article indicates that a leaked UN report accused Rwanda of "recruiting and training Burundian refugees in a Rwandan camp to fight against the Burundian government" (5 Feb. 2016). An article by *Newsweek*, an American news magazine and website (*Newsweek* n.d.), reports that a February 2016 "expert report" to the UN Security Council "cited testimony from 18 Burundian combatants who said they were recruited from the Mahama refugee camp in Rwanda and given training in the use of weapons" (*Newsweek* 2 Dec. 2016). The same source reports that the combatants, who were located in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, stated that "some of the training was carried out by Rwandan military personnel" (*Newsweek* 2 Dec. 2016). In a December 2015 report on the recruitment of Burundian refugees, Refugees International indicates that, while doing field research in Rwanda, they "received numerous allegations ... that refugees were being targeted for recruitment into non-state armed groups," including in the Mahama refugee camp and in urban areas (RI 14 Dec. 2015, 3). Sources report that the Rwandan government has denied its involvement (*Newsweek* 2 Dec. 2016; Al Jazeera 5 Feb. 2016; RFI 25 Nov. 2015). Radio France internationale (RFI) further reports that the UNHCR indicated that [translation] "they had no proof of such recruitment" (RFI 25 Nov. 2015). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.4 Situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports that Burundian refugees in the Lusenda refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo fear infiltration and attacks by the Imbonerakure and fear for their security (AFP 23 Jan. 2016). According to AFP, refugees in the Lusenda refugee camp fear that it is too close to the border with Burundi (23 Jan. 2016). AFP notes that the camp is 70 kilometres from Burundi by land, but only 35 kilometres distant when crossing Lake Tanganvika (23 Jan. 2016). A news article by MONUSCO [Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (UN Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo)] states that, despite the presence of [translation] "different security rings" in the camp from the Congolese military, the police, and MONUSCO, refugees feared [translation] "eventual attacks from men coming from Burundi" (UN 29 Dec. 2016). RFI reports that the Congolese national police established a post within the Democratic Republic of Congo camp, while MONUSCO ensured the security around the Lusenda refugee camp, due to "rumours of the presence of Burundian rebels" (10 Jan. 2016). RPA states that [translation] "emissaries" from Bujumbura have gone to "some locations" in the Democratic Republic of Congo to track regime opponents, but that, as of January 2016, no cases of assassination attempts or human rights violations against Burundian refugees had been reported (RPA 20 Jan. 2016).

According to RFI, Congolese security forces reported that they had intercepted 36 members of old and new Burundian rebel groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo (5 Jan. 2016). The same source reports that a former Burundian army captain was arrested at the Lusenda refugee camp where he was conducting recruitment along with three other people (RFI 5 Jan. 2016). The same source further indicates that Congolese security forces believe that Rwanda was implicated in the creation of new Burundian rebel groups (RFI 5 Jan. 2016). In a report on Burundian refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Refugees International states that it "has learned of credible allegations that isolated incidents of recruitment [by Burundian rebel forces] have taken place among Burundian refugees in the DRC" (26 May 2016, 9).

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 Ligue ITEKA was officially disbanded by a ministerial decree from the Minister of the Interior and of Patriotic Development on 3 January 2017, accusing the organization of being "'a repeat offender in tarnishing the brand image of the country and of sowing hate and division amongst the Burundi population'" (Frontline Defenders 4 Jan. 2017).

[2] Operating since 2001, Radio publique africaine (RPA) is a community-based radio which is broadcasted throughout most of Burundi as well as parts of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Tanzania (RPA

n.d.). It describes itself as [translation] "the voice of the voiceless" and puts special emphasis on "the defense of vulnerable groups" (RPA n.d.).

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