



The State Department web site below is a permanent electro information released prior to January 20, 2001. Please see [y](#) material released since President George W. Bush took offic This site is not updated so external links may no longer func [us](#) with any questions about finding information.

NOTE: External links to other Internet sites should not be c endorsement of the views contained therein.



U.S. Department of State

Burundi Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, January 30, 1998.

BURUNDI

President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya was overthrown in a military coup on July 25, 1996. The National Assembly and political parties operate under significant constraints. The regime headed by self-proclaimed interim president, Major Pierre Buyoya, abrogated the 1992 Constitution and the 1994 Convention of Government. The Buyoya regime promulgated a decree on September 13, 1996 which replaced the Constitution during the so-called Transition Period. Under this decree, the National Assembly does not have the power to remove the President of the Republic. The Prime Minister, appointed by the President, replaces the President in the event of the President's death or incapacity. Under the abrogated Constitution, the President of the National Assembly replaced the President. The judicial system is controlled by the Tutsi minority.

Buyoya holds power in conjunction with the Tutsi-dominated establishment forces. The country has been engaged in a civil war marked by ethnic violence, which includes fighting between the Tutsi-dominated army and armed Hutu rebel groups. The fighting has caused widespread civilian casualties since its beginning in October 1993.

Security forces consist of the army and the gendarmerie under the Ministry of Defense, the judicial police under the Ministry of Justice, and the Documentation Service under the presidency. The army and the security services remain committed to protecting the interests of the Tutsi minority. The security forces committed numerous, serious, human rights abuses.

Burundi is poor and densely populated, with over four-fifths of the population engaged in subsistence

agriculture. The small modern sector, based largely on the export of coffee and tea, has been damaged by an economic embargo imposed by neighboring states in July 1996. The ongoing violence since 1993 has caused severe economic disruption and dislocation. Large numbers of internally displaced persons have been unable to produce their own food crops and depend largely on international humanitarian assistance. Government efforts to privatize parastatal enterprises are at a virtual halt. Per capita national income is estimated at less than \$200 per year.

The human rights situation remains poor. Despite Buyoya's avowed intention to end abuses by the military forces, security forces continued to commit numerous, serious, human rights abuses, which the Government was largely unable or unwilling to prevent. Perpetrators generally were not punished.

Military forces committed extrajudicial killings, including massacres of unarmed civilian Hutus. With their superior firepower and wide dispersion, the armed forces committed the most widespread abuses. Tutsi civilian extremists sometimes accompanied the armed forces during operations, and the armed forces permitted them to engage in violence against Hutus. There continued to be numerous disappearances. There were credible reports of torture of prisoners. Prison conditions remain life threatening. Arbitrary arrest and lengthy pretrial detention are problems. The court system suffers from a lengthy backlog. The dysfunctional justice system could not effectively address the country's problems because of its lack of independence, inefficiency, administrative disruption, and the partiality of its Tutsi officials. Authorities infringed on citizens' privacy rights. The Government controls nearly all the media. The Government restricts freedom of assembly and prohibits political demonstrations. The Government limits freedom of association. The Government place some restrictions on freedom of movement.

According to an international human rights organization, fewer civilians were killed than in the previous year; however, serious incidents of ethnically motivated destruction and extrajudicial killing occurred throughout the country.

Government efforts to restore security were inadequate. Armed troops, civilian militias, and rebel forces killed both armed and unarmed ethnic rivals, including women, children, and the elderly. Land mines killed and injured many persons, mostly noncombatants. Members of the armed forces, vigilante groups, and rebel groups committed serious human rights violations with impunity. The continuing lack of accountability for killings and ethnic violence and impunity for those responsible for the 1993 coup attempt and the ethnic massacres that followed contributed significantly to national insecurity.

Citizens do not have the right to change their government. Legal and societal discrimination against women continues to be a serious problem; violence against women also occurs. Ethnic discrimination against Hutus is widespread. The Twa (Pygmy) minority remains marginalized economically, socially, and politically. The Government cannot protect the rights of children or prevent discrimination against the disabled.

Tutsi militias committed serious abuses. However, a human rights organization reported that there were fewer instances of armed Tutsi vigilantes engaging in violence against Hutus.

Hutu rebel forces committed serious abuses, including massacres of both Hutu and Tutsi civilians.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

Amnesty international estimated that between October 1993 and August 1997. Approximately 200,000 people were killed in ethnic violence, according to independent reports. An international relief organization estimated that between 4,500 to 9,000 persons (an average of 500 to 1000 persons per month) were killed during the first 9 months of the year.

According to international observers, during the month of January, in Buteganzwa and Rango Communes, Kayanza province, government troops summarily executed 200 to 300 young Hutu men as well as a number of women and children, while forcibly resettling the local Hutu population into regroupment camps. According to an international human rights organization, on January 5, soldiers and vigilantes attacked civilians in Bukeye Commune, Muramvya province, killing 26 persons.

On January 10, in Muyinga province near the Kobero border crossing, according to a number of sources, gendarmes killed between 122 and 128 Burundian Hutu refugees who had been expelled from Tanzania and were believed to belong to an armed rebel group. Following this incident, the regional military commander was replaced and the gendarmes taken into custody.

On March 1, according to an international human rights organization, soldiers killed 37 persons in Muhuta Commune, Bujumbura Rural province. On March 27, at the village of Mitonto, Rumonge Commune, Bururi province, government troops killed 147 civilians, according to independent press reports. The Government initially claimed that its troops had killed only 4 persons, but later revised the total number of deaths to 57 persons. On April 1, the Government announced that it had sent an investigation team into the area.

On May 7, according to a Western observer, government troops killed 10 to 15 persons and wounded a number of others in Isare Commune, Bujumbura Rural province. On May 11, according to an international human rights organization, soldiers ordered civilians in Kanyosha Commune, Bujumbura Rural province, to assemble, then fired upon them, killing 15 persons. Several sources reported that on May 15, at the pentecostal church of Mugendo, Bujumbura Rural province, soldiers arrested 45 persons, executed 42 of them, and wounded three other persons.

According to a Western observer, on June 6, soldiers based at Mugendo, Bujumbura Rural province, killed 17 civilians who were returning to their homes in Muhuta Commune, Bujumbura Rural province.

On June 13, according to a Western source, in Bujumbura Rural province, government troops fired on villagers participating in a funeral ceremony, killing six persons and wounding four others.

In early August, an antitank mine detonated in Cibitoke province killing nine persons, according to an international relief organization.

The Government concluded the trials of several hundred persons accused of conspiracy in the ethnic massacres following the October 1993 death of former president Melchior Ndadaye. According to an international human rights organization, 44 persons were convicted and sentenced to death during 1997. More than 100 persons have been convicted and sentenced to death since March 1996. On July 31, the Government executed six of those convicted.

The three persons accused of the 1995 killings of Italian religious workers in Bururi province have not been brought to justice. According to a high-ranking official, the Government is seeking the extradition of the accused perpetrators from Rwanda and Uganda, to which they are believed to have fled following their "escape from custody" in 1995.

The Government's investigation of the June 1996, killing in Cibitoke province of three expatriate employees of the ICRC by unknown gunmen has not produced any arrests. The Government claims that Hutu rebels were responsible for the murders, but others accuse the army.

In early August, FRODEBU party parliamentarian Paul Sirahenda and his chauffeur disappeared in Makamba province. Sirahenda's burned-out car was found near the Tanzanian border. Sirahenda and his chauffeur were not found. According to FRODEBU, Sirahenda is the twenty-third regular or alternate FRODEBU parliamentarian killed since the October 1993 coup. In 1996 the military forces claimed that they had arrested 25 suspects involved in some of these killings and disappearances. However, none of the suspects has been tried for any of these killings or the attempted killings of several prominent Hutu politicians.

On January 2 and 3, according to an international human rights organization, Hutu rebels attacked the commune of Bubanza, Bubanza province. They killed 14 persons and injured 9 others.

On January 12 and 13, according to an international human rights organization, Hutu rebels attacked the commune of Rugombo, Cibitoke province. They killed 22 persons and wounded 4 others.

On March 8, three people were killed in Kanyosha commune, Bujumbura rural province, by Hutu rebels, according to an international human rights organization.

On March 19 and 20, according to a Western observer, Hutu rebels attacked three regroupment camps in Buganda Commune, Cibitoke province and killed 153 persons.

On July 20, in the Kabonza section of Nyanza-Lac Commune, Makamba province, Hutu rebels killed 13 civilians, burned a number of houses and stole cattle, according to a Western source.

Hutu rebels killed Hutu civilians who refused to pay "taxes" to the rebels.

b. Disappearance

Human rights groups reported that abductions and disappearances were commonplace throughout the year. Disappearances were the result of both ethnic and political rivalry. Reliable numerical estimates are not available. See Section 1.a. for information regarding the June 13 disappearance of FRODEBU party parliamentarian Paul Sirahenda.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Both the decree of September 13, 1996, and the suspended constitution prohibit these abuses; however, members of the security forces continued to torture and otherwise abuse persons.

Conditions in state-run prisons were life threatening and characterized by severe overcrowding and inadequate hygiene, clothing, medical care, food, and water. Prisoners must rely on family members to provide an adequate diet, and officials acknowledged that digestive illness was a serious problem among the prisoners. Women were housed separately from men. U.N. human rights monitors and representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross were permitted to visit prisons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest, detention, and exile; however, arbitrary arrest and detention are

problems. The law places no limit on the total length of pretrial detention. Presiding magistrates are authorized to issue arrest warrants. Regular police and gendarmes can make arrests without a warrant but must submit a written report to a magistrate within 48 hours of any arrest. A magistrate can order the suspect released or confirm the charges and continue detention, initially for 15 days, then subsequently for periods of 30 days as necessary to prepare the case for trial.

The law requires arrest warrants. The police must follow the same procedures as magistrates, but have detained suspects for extended periods without announcing charges, certifying the cases, or forwarding them to the Ministry of Justice as required. There were numerous instances of arbitrary arrest. Bail was permitted in some cases. According to a human rights organization, incommunicado detention exists, although the law prohibits it.

The disruption of the political process and the general level of insecurity severely impeded the judicial process. There are reportedly more than 7,000 pretrial detainees, or about 80 percent of the prison population.

Ex-president and Parena party leader Jean-Baptiste Bagaza has been under house arrest since March 16. He is accused of plotting against the life of the President and illegal possession of military weapons.

On July 4, 44 of the 79 people detained for alleged involvement in the 1993 coup attempt were arraigned before the Supreme Court; 29 entered pleas. All 29 pled not guilty.

Around September 1, Louis Ntureka, FRODEBU member and accountant of the National Assembly, was arrested at a roadblock in Bujumbura and accused of being in contact with armed Hutu rebels. On September 2, Callixte Masabo, an agronomist and FRODEBU member who is the director of the Government's regional development society of Rumonge in Bururi province was arrested and accused of being in contact with armed Hutu rebels. Around September 5, Doctor Sylvere Sakubu, a member of the 47-member national committee of FRODEBU, was arrested at his home in Bujumbura and accused of being in contact with armed Hutu rebels. On September 18, Uprona party leader Charles Mukasi was arrested and released the same day for conducting an unauthorized press conference.

One human rights organization estimates that the authorities hold from 500 to 1000 political detainees.

The Government has not