

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 Basededonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca.

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Burundi: The Imbonerakure, including their profile, activities and ties to the authorities, particularly the police in Bujumbura; whether they are able to locate a person anywhere in the country or to prevent a person from leaving the country (2010-March 2013)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

The Imbonerakure are the youth chapter of the of the National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for Defence and Democracy (Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces de défense et de la démocratie, CNDD-FDD) (Professor 13 Mar. 2013; LDGL 13 Mar. 2013; UN 29 Sept. 2010, para. 12). The CNDD-FDD is the party in power in Burundi (ibid.; LDGL 13 Mar. 2013; Syfia Grands Lacs 24 Aug. 2012). The name of the group means [translation] "those who see from far" (LDGL 13 Mar. 2013; UN 5 Nov. 2012; International Crisis Group 12 Feb. 2010, 17). According to Human Rights Watch, the concept of [translation] "youths" with regard to political party affiliations in Burundi usually refers to people between the ages of 18 and 35 (Human Rights Watch May 2010, 16). Human Rights Watch indicated that the age limit for membership in the Imbonerakure is 39 (ibid.).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an investigator with the Great Lakes Region Human Rights League (Ligue des droits de la personne dans la région des Grands Lacs, LDGL) stated that the Imbonerakure are [translation] "numerous" and present throughout Burundi (13 Mar. 2013). An article published by IWACU, a Burundian information site, also indicated that they are active in [translation] "various locations" in the country (IWACU 30 July 2012).

The Imbonerakure apparently consist mainly of demobilized former rebels (LDGL 13 Mar. 2013; Professor 13 Mar. 2013; UN 5 Nov. 2012). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a professor of religious studies at the University of Sudbury who writes in particular about the political situation in Burundi stated that many of them are unemployed and idle individuals who think they can secure positions by campaigning with the Imbonerakure (Professor 13 Mar. 2013). He also stated that many are illiterate and have little training (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Several sources indicated that the group is sometimes described as a [translation] "militia" (Professor 13 Mar. 2013; UN 5 Nov. 2012; *Arc-en-ciel* 17 Aug. 2012). Some of the Imbonerakure are reportedly armed (ibid.; LDGL 13 Mar. 2013; IWACU 30 July 2012). According to the LDGL investigator, they have [translation] "machetes, batons and clubs" (LDGL 13 Mar. 2013). Sources indicated that some also possess firearms (Human Rights Watch May 2012, 20; *Arc-en-ciel* 17 Aug. 2012; IWACU 30 July 2012). However, according to IWACU, only law enforcement can carry firearms legally in Burundi (ibid.).

2. Activities

Several sources reported acts of violence committed by the Imbonerakure (LDGL 13 Mar. 2013; Syfia Grands Lacs 24 Aug. 2012; IWACU 30 July 2012). According to some sources, they are particularly involved in

- beatings and injuries (ibid.; Syfia Grands Lacs 24 Aug. 2012; LDGL 13 Mar. 2013);
- extrajudicial killings (ibid.; *Arc-en-ciel* 17 Aug. 2012; US 24 May 2012);
- banditry (*Arc-en-ciel* 17 Aug. 2012);
- [Human Rights Watch English version] "political killings" (Human Rights Watch May 2012, 72).

The Imbonerakure particularly target political opponents (LDGL 13 Mar. 2013; Syfia Grands Lacs 24 Aug. 2012; UN 5 Nov. 2012). The CNDD-FDD reportedly uses the Imbonerakure to harass and intimidate members of other political parties (ibid. 29 Sept. 2010, para. 12; Human Rights Watch May 2012, 20). Similarly, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, published by the US Department of State for 2010 and 2009, indicated that the Imbonerakure threatened and

attacked members of the opposition and that they blocked some of their meetings over the years (US 8 Apr. 2011, 18; *ibid.* 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 3). The LDGL investigator stated that the Imbonerakure also [translation] "searched and raided" the homes of members of the opposition (13 Mar. 2013). In a report prepared for the UN Human Rights Council, the independent expert charged with examining the human rights situation in Burundi stated that the Imbonerakure were also involved in 2010 in about 10 clashes with partisans of other political bodies, particularly those of the National Liberation Forces (Forces nationales de liberation, FNL); on 17 January, a member of the FNL was allegedly injured and, at least 10 people were wounded on 24 January (UN 29 Sept. 2010, para. 27).

According to the LDGL investigator, the Imbonerakure [translation] "collude" with the authorities and "integrate themselves into administrative activities at the ground level of the national intelligence service (service national de renseignement, SNR)" (13 Mar. 2013). An article published in August 2012 by the Burundian weekly *Arc-en-ciel* reported that the Imbonerakure are working with the police and with the National Defence Force (Force de défense nationale) (17 Aug. 2012). According to the LDGL investigator in Bujumbura, the Imbonerakure has especially strong ties to the police in the surrounding communes (13 Mar. 2013). Human Rights Watch reported that the Imbonerakure had carried out joint activities with the SNR in 2011 against members of the FNL (Human Rights Watch May 2012, 20). The organization added that [Human Rights Watch English version] "[i]t is not always clear whether senior government or party officials have planned or ordered the actions of individual members," but their impunity and possible cooperation with the SNR seem to indicate "state involvement and interest in backing their actions" (*ibid.*).

The UN independent expert stated that some Imbonerakure sometimes assist state officers in making arrests (UN 29 Sept. 2010, para. 12). Similarly, the LDGL investigator indicated that Imbonerakure are sometimes involved in the [translation] "arbitrary" arrest of members of the opposition "under the guise of national police or SNR officers" (13 Mar. 2013).

Several sources indicated that the Imbonerakure conduct patrols (Syfia Grands Lacs 24 Aug. 2012; UN 29 Sept. 2010, para. 12; LDGL 13 Mar. 2013). They are apparently armed while on patrol (*ibid.*; Human Rights Watch May 2012, 21; *Arc-en-ciel* 17 Aug. 2012). Some sources reported that the patrols take place at night (*ibid.*; Syfia Grands Lacs 24 Aug. 2012; LDGL 13 Mar. 2013).

According to the IWACU, the Imbonerakure [translation] "seem to want to replace law enforcement" (30 July 2012). The article published in *Arc-en-ciel* indicated that the Imbonerakure [translation] "are starting to gradually eclipse the national police in Burundi and the National Defence Force in certain provinces in the country" (17 Aug. 2012).

Several sources noted that the Imbonerakure operate with complete impunity (Human Rights Watch May 2012, 72; LDGL 13 Mar. 2013; Syfia Grands Lacs 24 Aug. 2012). According to *Country Reports*, that impunity is due to its affiliation with the ruling party (US 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 3).

However, some observers reject those accusations of complicity with the authorities (Professor 13 Mar. 2013; IWACU 30 July 2012). A spokesperson for the police, cited by IWACU, denied the allegations of complicity between police officers and members of the Imbonerakure, and added that not all Imbonerakure commit reprehensible acts and that the police crack down only on people who have committed offences (*ibid.*). The Professor of religious studies stated that the Imbonerakure are more a hinderance to government and police than they are their accomplices (Professor 13 Mar. 2013). The Professor is also of the opinion that the wrongdoers within the Imbonerakure [translation] "are too quickly associated" with the government (*ibid.*). According to him, only a part of them are involved in the wrongdoing, but there is a tendency in Burundi to call all [translation] "armed bandits" "Imbonerakure" (*ibid.*). He also stated that he does [translation] "not think that the national intelligence service employs them" (*ibid.*). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

3. Ability to Locate a Person or Prevent a Person from Leaving

According to the LDGL investigator, the Imbonerakure are capable of finding a person anywhere in Burundi, particularly because of the country's small size (LDGL 13 Mar. 2013). He explained that

[translation]

Everyone knows everyone; travelling by bus is common. A stranger in a community is known by all. The entire population speaks the same language. And since the Imbonerakure are scattered throughout the country, they monitor the movements of all people passing through because that is their day-to-day job. (*ibid.*)

Human Rights Watch noted in an interview on October 2011 that a former government authority stated that a demobilized member of the CNDD-FDD had asked the Imbonerakure to follow the movements of former FNL members (May 2012, 30-31).

The investigator also indicated that the Imbonerakure are able to stop an individual from leaving Burundi (LDGL 13 Mar. 2013). He explained that since the Imbonerakure have a hierarchical structure that rises to the national level, if they wanted to stop a person from leaving, they could inform [translation] "the appropriate authorities at the highest level" (*ibid.*).

However, according to the Professor of religious studies, the Imbonerakure do not look for people as such; rather, they go after people who get in their way (Professor 13 Mar. 2013). The Professor also raised doubts about the Imbonerakure's ability to take part in administrative systems that could allow them to track down a person or prevent them from leaving the country (*ibid.*). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact a professor emeritus at the University of Florida and a researcher at the Centre d'études africaines de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales in France were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: Agence de presse africaine; AllAfrica; Amnesty International; *Bujumbura News*; *Burundi Bwacu*; *Burundi Réalités*; ecoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; International Federation for Human Rights; United Nations - Refworld; Radio Isanganiro; Radio sans frontières Bonasha; Radio télévision nationale du Burundi.

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