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Burundi: Unlawful killings on the rise

"Failure by the Transitional Government of Burundi to condemn increasing killings of civilians by its armed forces amounts to acquiescence, in what has become a well-established pattern," Amnesty International said in a report published today; *Punishing the population - reprisal killings escalate*.

The report documents the deliberate killing of scores of unarmed Hutu civilians by the Burundian armed forces in reprisal for military activity by Hutu-dominated armed political movements. These include the killing of 30 people in Bubanza province in February 2002, 23 people in Rural Bujumbura province in March, and a further 27 people in Bubanza province in April. Some of the child victims were bayoneted or burned to death.

None of these killings are known to have been investigated, or even publicly condemned, by the state authorities.

The report also condemns numerous human rights abuses by armed political groups, including the killing of 18 unarmed civilians, among them six children and a new-born baby, in Bururi province in November 2001, and repeated killings of unarmed civilians in multiple ambushes on civilian transport. Armed political groups are continuing to unlawfully kill those who fail to contribute financially to their organizations, suspected informants and captured soldiers.

"Government forces and armed political groups opposing them continue to show a cynical disregard for civilian life. The armed conflict cannot be used to justify, condone or ignore mass human rights abuses. The people of Burundi have suffered a lot for too long and this has to stop," Amnesty International said.

Government forces and armed political groups must take immediate action to bring an end to unlawful killings. The Transitional Government of Burundi should strengthen state institutions in order to improve accountability and end the impunity of government armed forces for gross human rights violations. Failure to do so will only perpetuate the human rights crisis and civil war.

Amnesty International is also calling on political and military leaders of armed political movements to take responsibility for their part in Burundi's human rights crisis, and to take

immediate steps to condemn abuses by their forces and to halt further attacks on unarmed civilians.

Publication of the report coincides with consultations at the United Nations Security Council on the situation in Burundi. Amnesty International specifically appeals to the Security Council to take steps to ensure that human rights concerns are an integral part of on-going negotiations aimed at establishing a cease-fire and cessation of hostilities in Burundi, and of its other efforts to establish peace and security in the Great Lakes region.

In particular, the Security Council should express its deep concern at the escalation in extrajudicial executions by the Burundian armed forces and the numerous human rights abuses committed by armed political groups since the beginning of the year. The organization asks the Security Council to call on the Burundian government and leaders of armed political groups to abide by international humanitarian law standards, and to condemn and halt all extrajudicial executions by government forces and unlawful killings by civilians by armed groups.

Background

Following the inauguration of a Transitional Government of Burundi in November 2001, armed conflict increased throughout the country. Serious human rights abuses have been committed in this context, and killings of unarmed civilians have escalated, demonstrating the fragility of the political process and the continued scorn for human rights by all belligerents.

The Transitional Government of Burundi and armed political groups have expressed commitment to human rights. At present, the credibility of such statements is undermined by the scale of ongoing human rights abuses in the country, and by the failure to take effective measures to address the human rights crisis.

For a copy of the report in English or French, please contact: cateam@amnesty.org

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