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TANZANIA: REFUGEES SHOULD NOT BE RETURNED TO NEAR CERTAIN DEATH

A high-level Amnesty International delegation led by former Canadian External Affairs Minister Flora MacDonald is travelling to Tanzania this week to urge the government to stop forcing refugees back to Burundi against their will, as evidence mounts that hundreds of returning refugees from Tanzania and Zaire have been massacred in recent weeks and months.

“The danger facing returning refugees was tragically brought home on 10 January, when almost all of the 126 refugees forced to go back to Burundi were killed within hours or even moments of crossing the border,” Amnesty International said today.

“Whether any more of the 200,000 Burundi refugees in Tanzania are forced out is for them literally a question of life or death.”

Another group of 48 expelled refugees were reportedly tortured before most of them were killed around 5 January, part of an escalating pattern of “disappearances”, massacres and other political killings that Amnesty International has documented in recent months.

The organization fears that the Tanzanian government may be planning to forcibly return more refugees after official announcements that all Burundi refugees must report to refugee camps by 18 January, and in its meetings with Tanzanian officials the delegation will urge the government not to forcibly return any more refugees to Burundi and to ensure that local authorities act in keeping with that policy.

The delegation will be in Tanzania from 22-27 January, and is seeking meetings with President Benjamin Mkapa, and Ministers of Defence, Home Affairs, and Foreign Affairs. The delegation also hopes to meet with former President Julius Nyerere who has played a leading role in trying to mediate the conflict in Burundi.

Other members of the delegation are: David Bull, Director of Amnesty International UK; Firoze Manji, Africa Program Director; and Alex Neve, Refugee Officer.

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