



Burundi - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Friday 24 April 2009

General situation in Burundi at April 2009

The *Small Arms Survey* in April 2009 states:

“In 2008, more than 1,000 people were killed and nearly 1,300 injured by armed violence in Burundi, where the homicide rate is relatively high at 12.3 for 100,000 inhabitants” (Small Arms Survey, (21 April 2009), *'Insecurity is also a war': An assessment of armed violence in Burundi*).

A *Reuters Foundation* article in April 2009 says

“Burundi's last remaining rebel group has officially registered as a political party ahead of next year's national elections in the coffee-producing central African nation, officials said. Integrating the Forces for National Liberation (FNL) is seen as the last hurdle for peace in Burundi, raising hopes that the tiny nation may shuck off its violent past. "It is definitely the end of war in Burundi," FNL boss Agathon Rwasa told reporters late on Tuesday, adding that his party would now prepare for the 2010 elections” (Reuters Foundation, (22 April 2009), *Burundi's last rebel group becomes a political party*).

An *IRIN* article in April 2009 says “Delays in the implementation of a 2006 peace accord in Burundi contributed to a deteriorating human rights situation there in 2008, according to a leading human rights organisation. "The misunderstanding between the government and the FNL [Forces nationales de liberation] has had serious consequences on the violations of human rights," David Nahimana, chairman of Iteka, the national human rights group, said” (IRIN, (21 April 2009), *Burundi: Human rights worsened in 2008 – report*).

A *BBC* news story in March 2009 points out that “The disarmament of Burundi's last major rebel group, Forces for National Liberation (FNL), has begun after months of delays” (BBC, (17 March 2009), *Burundi ex-rebels start to disarm*).

An introductory paragraph in the *US Department of State* report issued in February 2009 on events of 2008 says

“The government's human rights record remained poor; government security forces continued to commit numerous serious human rights abuses. Members of the army (FDN), the police, and the National Intelligence Service (SNR) were responsible for killings, torture, and beatings of civilians and detainees (including suspected FNL supporters), although there were fewer such reports than in the previous year. There were reports that security forces raped women and girls. Impunity and harsh, life-threatening prison and detention center conditions remained problems, and reports of

arbitrary arrest and detention continued. Prolonged pretrial detention, lack of judicial independence and efficiency, and judicial corruption continued. While government security forces, especially the FDN, took some steps to prosecute the perpetrators of human rights abuses, most individuals acted with impunity. The government continued to hold some political prisoners and political detainees. It restricted freedom of assembly and association, especially for political parties, and did not tolerate direct criticism of the president. Security forces continued to harass members of the opposition. Domestic and sexual violence and discrimination against women remained problems. A large number of weapons circulated throughout the general population, and many violent incidents and killings were considered the result of vigilante abuse and personal score-settling" (US Department of State, (25 February 2009), *2008 Human Rights Report: Burundi*).

EURAC in February 2009 on page 1 of a document says that

"...the country has achieved considerable progress since the ending of the war: the genuine progress in the negotiations between the government and the FNL during recent months is likely to result in the military and politico-administrative integration of the last rebel group in the near future. Political debate takes place in an effective multi-party context and, in spite of pressure from the authorities; the media and civil society manage to play their role. Hutu/Tutsi divisions are no longer blamed for all the country's ills and the army is no longer an instrument used by one ethnic group to protect its privileges" (EURAC, (26 February 2009), *Burundi: preparing for free and fair elections in 2010*).

Page 1 of a paper by the ISS issued in February 2009 says

"At the moment, the political mood in Burundi might be said to be one of cautious optimism. At the end of December 2008, it appeared that the final obstacles were being cleared away to the implementation of a peace accord between the government and the insurgent Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu/Forces Nationales de Libération (PALIPEHUTU-FNL) as prefigured in their ceasefire agreement of 7 September 2006. As the UN Secretary General had continued to emphasise in his regular reports on the situation, this was a matter of urgency not only in the light of preparations for elections to be held in 2010, but so that the country should enjoy a more stable platform from which to tackle its myriad economic and social problems. This promising phase of a protracted process was marked by the government's release of the first batch of rebel prisoners and by a belated agreement by PALIPEHUTU-FNL to drop the first part of its name, "Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People", a requirement if it intended to enter constitutionally sanctioned politics" (ISS, (2 February 2009), *Burundi: The End of the Tunnel?*).

The *UN Security Council* in December 2008 says that "Noting with concern the continuing human rights violations and restrictions on civil liberties, including arrests of members of the political opposition and representatives of civil society, the media and trade unions and welcoming the decision of the Government to rescind its order to regulate meetings and demonstrations of political parties and associations..." (UN Security Council, (22 December 2008), *Security Council extends mandate of United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi*).

In November 2008 *HRW* note

“The detention of political activist Alexis Sinduhije and 36 others by Burundian police on November 3, 2008, highlights the growing obstacles to the free exercise of civil and political rights in Burundi, Human Rights Watch said today. Sinduhije, well-known as a former radio journalist, has been trying since February to form an opposition political party, the Movement for Security and Democracy (MSD). The detentions follow extensive harassment of leaders of several parties opposed to the dominant National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of the Democracy (CNDD-FDD)” (HRW, (5 November 2008), *Burundi: Detentions of Political Opponents Threaten Rights*).

Page 3 of a *UN Security Council* report from November 2008 says

“The overall security situation in Burundi saw some improvement during the period under review, following the cessation of large-scale hostilities between the Government and Palipehutu-FNL on 26 May. However, criminal activities perpetrated by alleged Palipehutu-FNL elements, former combatants and members of the security forces, as well as unidentified armed individuals, persisted throughout the country. These activities were characterized by grenade attacks, armed robberies, looting, ambushes and killings” (UN Security Council, (28 November 2008), *Fourth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi*).

Page 10 of this report adds that

“The incidence of serious human rights violations, which had sharply increased in April during the hostilities, remained high during the following months. Recently, a growing trend of harassment of representatives of civil society, trade unions and opposition parties by the Burundian authorities has been observed, including arbitrary arrest and detention. Impunity remained an issue of concern. Only a fraction of recorded human rights violations were investigated and only a small number of human rights violators were prosecuted and sentenced” (ibid).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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