

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JANUARY 27, 1993

For further information, contact:

Alison Des Forges
(716) 881-2758

Kenneth Roth
(212) 972-8400

Susan Osnos
(212) 972-8400



William Carmichael
Chair

Alice L. Brown
Vice Chair

Rakiya Omaar
Executive Director

Alex de Waal
Associate Director

Janet Fleischman
Karen Sorensen
Research Associates

Susan Osnos
Press Director

COMMITTEE

Roland Aigrant
Robert L. Bernstein
Julius L. Chambers
Michael Clough
Roberta Cohen
Carol Corillon
Alison L. DesForges
Adrian W. DeWind
Thomas M. Franck
Gail M. Gerhart
Jack Greenberg
Alice H. Henkin
Richard A. Joseph
Thomas Karls
Russell Karp
Stephen L. Kass
Randall Kennedy
John A. Marcum
Gay McDougall
Toni Morrison
James C. N. Paul
Robert H. Preiskel
Norman Redlich
Randall Robinson
Claude E. Welch, Jr.

OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE FOLLOWS HUMAN RIGHTS INVESTIGATION IN RWANDA

As threatened by local government officials, ethnic violence has exploded in Rwanda following the departure from the country of a commission investigating human rights abuses, with the majority Hutu resuming violent attacks on the Tutsi minority in the northwestern regions of Gisenyi and Ruhengeri. According to an Africa Watch representative who participated in the investigation, several officials had ordered a temporary halt to the violence during the commission's stay in Rwanda, but had asserted that the violence would resume once the investigation was completed. The commission left Rwanda on January 21, and the violence began once again the next day.

Africa Watch, a division of the New York-based Human Rights Watch, and the Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights coordinated the investigation by the International Commission on Human Rights Abuses in Rwanda. The Commission, created at the request of Rwandan human rights associations, conducted a two-week investigation in the country in mid-January.

The official Radio Rwanda reports the death toll from the communal violence of the last few days at 53, but local human rights organizations estimate that at least twice that number have died. Among the victims are a mother and daughter hacked to death in Nyramyumba, a family of three decapitated in Kayove, and ten others slaughtered as they fled from Ramba to Ruisiro. In addition, secondary schools in Gisenyi, Ruhengeri and Byumba prefectures have been attacked and many students are missing after having fled into the night. Rwandan employees of a Care International reforestation project in Byumba were severely beaten and the project had to stop its work in three communes. Road blocks manned by militias of what was formerly Rwanda's sole political party, the Mouvement Republicain National pour la Democratie et le Developpement (MRND), have cut traffic on roads in the northwest for the last week and made it difficult to obtain complete information on disorder in the region.

☐ 485 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10017-6104
(212) 972-8400
(212) 972-0905 (Fax)

☐ 1522 K St., NW, Suite 910
Washington, DC 20005-1202
(202) 371-6592
(202) 371-0124 (Fax)

☐ 90 Borough High Street
London SE1 1LL
(071) 378-8008
(071) 378-8029 (Fax)

AFRICA WATCH IS AN AFFILIATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH.

Robert L. Bernstein, Chair / Adrian W. DeWind, Vice-Chair / Aryeh Neier, Executive Director / Kenneth Roth, Deputy Director
Holly J. Burkhalter, Washington Director

At an interview with President Habyarimana on January 20, the Commission formally protested threats against those who had helped with its work and called upon the president and the minister of the interior, who was also present, to provide its witnesses and collaborators with full protection. The president declined a request that he speak on national radio to urge that those who had helped the Commission not be harmed in any way.

After examining official records in three prefectures, the Commission also found that the judicial system is paralyzed and exercises no effective power of punishment or deterrence against those who attack others. Those responsible for communal violence are virtually assured of impunity for their crimes.

The war in Rwanda, now halted by a cease-fire since July 1992, began with an invasion of the RPF on October 1, 1990. The Tutsi, who represent about 12 percent of the population, ruled Rwanda for centuries but were overthrown by the majority Hutu people in a revolution that began in 1959. In the years thereafter, Hutu killed about 20,000 Tutsi and drove 150,000 more into exile in surrounding countries. These refugees tried numerous times to invade Rwanda in the 1960s without success but were able to cross the frontier from Uganda in October 1990. The RPF now holds a portion of territory in northern Rwanda. During the fighting, people fled the densely populated regions that were under attack. Some 350,000 of these displaced persons now live in camps just south of the battle front while thousands of others have taken shelter with family or friends further south in the country. The displaced persons depend on food deliveries by the International Red Cross, which have been disrupted occasionally in recent weeks by RPF refusal to allow convoys along one of the major roads south into Rwanda.

The International Commission, coordinated by representatives of Africa Watch (N.Y.) and the International Federation of Human Rights (Paris), also included representatives from the Interafrican Union for Human Rights and from the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development (Montreal). In addition to representatives of Africa Watch and the International Federation of Human Rights, the Commission also included representatives from the ten jurists and human rights experts came from Belgium, Burkina Faso, Canada, France, Holland, Ivory Coast, Switzerland and the United States.

A brief video segment showing excavation of the grave sites is available.

Africa Watch is a nongovernmental organization created in 1988 to monitor human rights practices in Africa and to promote respect for internationally recognized standards. Its chair is William Carmichael. Its vice-chair is Alice Brown. Janet Fleischman and Karen Sorenson are Research Associates; Bronwen Manby is an Orville Schell fellow; Anthony Levintow, Ben Penglase and Urmi Shah are associates.

Africa Watch is a division of Human Rights Watch, an organization that also includes Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch, Middle East Watch and the Fund for Free Expression. The chair of Human Rights Watch is Robert L. Bernstein and the vice-chair is Adrian W. DeWind. Aryeh Neier is executive director of Human Rights Watch, the deputy director is Kenneth Roth; Holly J. Burkhalter is Washington director, Susan Osnos is press director and Gara LaMarche is associate director.

In Kinigi, the Commission excavated a common grave of more than a dozen victims in the backyard of the local government official. In Mutura, it uncovered another grave where the bodies of about ten victims had been dumped. These discoveries confirm accounts of eyewitnesses to the killings and support assertions that many other such graves exist elsewhere. In a previous visit to Rwanda in November 1991, Africa Watch representatives located skulls, bones, and other human remains scattered in an uninhabited region of eastern Rwanda. Since the start of a war between the Rwandan government and the Tutsi-based Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) on October 1, 1990, more than a thousand Tutsi have been killed and many more have lost homes that were burned and property that was looted in such communes as Kibilira, Kinigi, Mukingo, Mutura, Kanzenze and Giciye.

The Commission deplored the recent growth of armed youth groups and militias attached to political parties. Those accused of blocking roads and attacking opponents in the last week are organized by the MRND, which until last April had ruled the country for 19 years as a single party state, and its ally, the Coalition pour la Defense de la Republique (CDR). Three supporters of another political party, the Mouvement Democratique Republicain (MDR), were killed in Ruhengeri prefecture in the last several days and the property of members of other political parties was burned.

During their visit to Rwanda, two Commission members were stopped at an illegal road block set up by the MRND militia. The Tutsi interpreter with them was threatened with death by the youth, who were armed with machetes and who openly identified themselves as *Interahamwe*, or members of the MRND militia.

In an address on Radio Rwanda, Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana offered no condemnation of the violence and treated it as the result of popular displeasure with the most recent version of the Arusha Accords, an agreement meant to end the war with the RPF. Habyarimana, who continues to head the MRND, has shared authority since last April with Prime Minister Dr. Dismas Nsengiyaremye of the MDR. Their coalition government has divided on the terms for ending the war. President Habyarimana has refused to sign the most recent accords and has removed the foreign minister as head of the negotiating team, replacing him with the minister of defense. The prime minister has rejected this change. The dispute has prevented the departure of the delegation for Arusha where a new round of talks was due to begin on January 25. Habyarimana and his supporters have said that disorder will continue in an effort to block implementation of the accords which call for a new transitional government incorporating the RPF. The MRND is protesting the exclusion from the new government of the CDR, a party that has openly if not formally adopted an anti-Tutsi position.

The International Commission expressed grave concern for the many Rwandans who have assisted its work, either by providing testimony or by collaborating in its research. The father of one witness is dead, either by suicide or murder, after a crowd attacked his house in retribution for his son's assistance to the Commission. Many others associated with the Commission have been threatened with death, including one who was menaced in full view of Commission members as they boarded their plane to leave Rwanda. At the church of Nyamata where the Commission was taking testimony, witnesses awaiting their turn to speak were photographed by an agent of the secret service.