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RELEASED IN FULL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: THEODORE SELLIN
 DATE/CASE ID: 10 OCT 2002 200000294

News Service
 91/94

AI INDEX: AFR 47/WU 05/94
 EMBARGOED FOR 4 MAY 1994

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL LAUNCHES PUBLIC APPEAL FOR EXCEPTIONAL
 UNITED NATIONS ACTION ON RWANDA AND BURUNDI

Amnesty International is calling for a special session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) to act on the human rights crisis in Rwanda and Burundi and to hear UN experts report back on an immediate joint mission to those countries.

The organization is calling for the UN experts on extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", torture, violence against women, racism and the internally displaced to collect information in Rwanda and Burundi on the human rights situation there. The mission should then make their recommendations to governments, to the special session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, and to other institutions in the UN system.

Amnesty International is deeply shocked by the continuing human rights crisis in Rwanda, the prospect of an escalation of the crisis in Burundi and the failure of the international community to effectively deal with the horrendous massacres. The government and security forces of these countries have either ordered, triggered, incited, encouraged or condoned the violence in which traditional weapons such as machetes and spears or firearms have been used countrywide to kill their suspected or known opponents. In addition, a humanitarian crisis has begun as over 300,000 people have fled Rwanda to neighbouring countries, while an estimated two million -- over a quarter of the population -- are displaced within Rwanda.

Amnesty International has strongly condemned the thousands of extrajudicial executions by the armed forces and killings by vigilante gangs armed and mobilized by the former President Juvénal Habyarimana's ruling party to attack and kill known or perceived political opponents. Some reports put the death toll in Rwanda at 100,000. The UN expert on extrajudicial executions made extensive recommendations to prevent such human rights violations after his April 1993 visit to Rwanda but they were not implemented. He, too, strongly condemned the recent killings.

Amnesty International also repeats its condemnation of the roughly 100,000 killings in Burundi since October 1993, sometimes by the Tutsi-dominated security forces and allied

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Tutsi vigilantes, but also in large part by armed gangs of Hutu supported by some local government officials.

At a time when the UN Security Council has just decided to reduce the number of personnel in Rwanda from 2,486 to 270, Amnesty International is urging that the UN Security Council immediately expand the capacity of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) to protect human rights. In addition, Amnesty International is now urging member states to call for a special session of the UN Commission on Human Rights to hear the report of the experts and to take concrete steps, including action on their recommendations. The Commission should also ensure support for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in his efforts to address these situations and ensure coordination of the UN's human rights response.

The special session should also ensure that concrete steps are taken to do at least the following:

1. Ensure a human rights monitoring presence on the ground in both countries which should report on the human rights situation, take up cases, and act as a dissuasive presence. The special session could draw on the experience of other on-site human rights reporting operations. For example:
The first-ever special session of the Commission in 1992 appointed a Special Rapporteur on the former Yugoslavia who has some staff in the former Yugoslavia collecting information. In addition, he is sent all reports on human rights violations which come to the attention of UN personnel in UNPROFOR and the other UN specialized agencies.

The UN General Assembly with the Organization of American States (OAS) has established a civilian human rights monitoring mission in Haiti which issues public reports on the situation as well as public statements on particular incidents as they happen.

The UN Security Council should include a larger civilian police monitoring component (CIVPOLs) within the current peace-keeping operation in Rwanda (UNAMIR) with a mandate to report on and take up human rights abuses by all parties (the UN operation in Mozambique will soon have over 1,000 CIVPOLs). Amnesty International has already called for the UN Security Council to expand the UNAMIR human rights monitoring capacity in this way in its News Service of 14 April 1994.

2. Send a clear message to people in Rwanda and Burundi that human rights violators must be brought to justice and the victims and their families compensated.
3. Consider the report and recommendations of the UN fact-finding mission sent by the Secretary-General and just returned from Burundi.

4. Start developing a long term human rights program of action in Burundi and Rwanda to protect human rights and prevent further violations.

Amnesty International is appealing to the international community, and in particular to the Organization of African Unity and the Non-Aligned Movement, to ensure that a special session of the Commission takes place.

The organization hopes that, as required by the procedure, a UN member state will request the UN Secretary-General to convene a Special Session by submitting a request to the Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights in Geneva. Amnesty International also hopes that a majority of the 53 states who are members of the Commission will agree to the holding of such a session within four working days of such a request being made.