

Tutsi party pulls out of Burundi government amid ethnic violence

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BUJUMBURA, Dec 24 (AFP) - Burundi's main Tutsi political party announced Saturday that it was pulling out the power-sharing government amid an outburst of ethnic violence between Tutsis and majority Hutus.

Charls Mukasi, president of the Tutsi-dominated Union for National Progress (UPRONA), said the party was quitting the power-sharing government in protest over the recent appointment of a contested Hutu politician as speaker of the national assembly.

UNPRONA accuses the speaker, Jean Minani, of having urged Hutus to kill Tutsis following the assassination by the Tutsi-led military of Hutu President Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993 during an unsuccessful coup attempt.

Some 50,000 Burundians, mostly Tutsis, were killed in the violence that followed that assassination.

But Mukasi acknowledged that some of UNPRONA's members in the government, who include Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko and six other cabinet ministers, were resisting party orders that they resign.

"Those ministers who have not yet handed in their resignations must do so now," he said, adding that the portfolios attributed to UNPRONA under a power-sharing agreement with the Hutu-led Front for Democracy in Burundi in September.

Talks on resolving the crisis were continuing Saturday, officials said.

The UNPRONA move came amid an outburst of fighting between Tutsi and Hutu militias which has left dozens dead and wounded over the past week and revived fears that Burundi was headed to the same ethnic carnage which left between 500,000 and one million dead, again mostly Tutsis, in neighboring Rwanda.

That war broke out after the

Hutu presidents of both countries were killed when their plane crashed in mysterious circumstances in the Rwandan capital Kigali on April 6.

The two countries have the same racial mix, about 80 percent Hutu and 20 percent Tutsi.

Although the situation in Bujumbura has calmed since the imposition of an overnight curfew on Wednesday, two persons were wounded overnight in a grenade explosion and there was sporadic gunfire in the mixed neighborhood of Bwiza, scene of some of the bloodiest fighting earlier in the week, officials said Saturday.

National radio also reported gunfire in two northern Bujumbura districts.

Mukasi called on UPRONA militants and the general population to remain peaceful despite the political crisis.

Many Hutu residents of Bwiza fled to a neighboring district earlier in the week, fearing attacks from Tutsu fighters.

The fighting in the capital erupted December 18 following the mur-

ders of seven people in the largely Tutsi Musaga district in the southern suburbs of Bujumbura. Hutus were subsequently killed in Tutsi reprisal attacks around the central market and in Bwiza.

The Hutu militia involved in the Bujumbura fighting are suspected to be supporters of former interior minister Leonard Nyangoma, a Hutu fiercely opposed to power-sharing who is living in exile in Zaire, where he has created the National Council for the Defence of Democracy, a political party with its own military wing.

In northern Burundi alone, some 20, 30 or 50 people are hacked to death with machetes, shot, or blown apart by grenades every week or so, and tensions are exacerbated there by the presence of more than 200,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees.

Pierre Buyoya, president of Burundi from 1987 until July 1993, warned on December 8 that the violence had reached a level where the country risked plunging into all-out civil war.

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