

Burundi holds funeral of slain president

Annie Thomas

AFP, December 6, 1993

BUJUMBURA, Dec 6 (AFP) - Burundi soldiers on Monday carried the coffin of the country's assassinated president, Melchior Ndadaye, into a packed cathedral here for his funeral a month and a half after an aborted military coup.

The whole of the military general staff sat in the back rows of the building for the requiem mass for Ndadaye, the country's first elected leader from the Hutu majority, and seven other "martyrs for democracy" slain on October 21.

The bishop of Bujumbura, Simon Ntamwana, began the service with an appeal to all Burundis "for reconciliation and confidence" before both Roman Catholic and Protestant hymns were sung.

Relief workers estimate that tens of thousands of people have been killed in ethnic strife between the Hutus and the small country's Tutsi minority, the traditional overlords, following the coup.

Hundreds of paramilitary police

lined the streets and Burundis gathered early to see the funeral cortege, but many residents stayed at home to follow the proceedings on radio or television for fear of more bloodshed.

The front pews in the modern, austere cathedral, where some 700 people attended the service, were occupied by Prime Minister Sylvie Kinigi and the families of the coup victims. The government, parliamentary deputies and the diplomatic corps were all present.

Next to Kinigi sat Foreign Minister Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, whose wife Eusebie was murdered before surviving members of the government took shelter in foreign embassies after the coup by troops of the Tutsi-dominated army.

The late president's widow, Laurence Ndadaye, sat separately with her three children, two boys aged eight and nine and a three-year-old girl, all dressed in black and white.

Foreign dignitaries attending included Zairean and Ugandan Prime

Ministers Faustin Birindwa and Cosmas Adyebo, the state secretary for development aid from former colonial power Belgium, Erik Derycke, and ministers from neighbouring Rwanda, to which scores of thousands of Burundis have fled.