

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH/AFRICA

Formerly Africa Watch

☐ 485 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6104, TEL (212) 972-8400, FAX (212) 972-0905, Email: hrwatchnyc@igc.apc.org
☐ 1522 K Street, NW, #910, Washington, DC 20005-1202, TEL (202) 371-6592, FAX (202) 371-0124, Email: hrwatchdc@igc.apc.org
☐ 90 Borough High Street, London, UK SE1 1LL, TEL (71) 378-8008, FAX (71) 378-8029, Email: hrwatchuk@gn.apc.org

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ABDULLAHI AN-NA'IM
Executive Director

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Washington Representative

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ALEX VINES

BERHANE WOLDEGABRIEL
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URGENT PLEASE FORWARD

Mr. Jose Ayala Lasso
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
By fax 011 41 22 917 0214

Dear Commissioner Ayala Lasso:

Human Rights Watch/Africa applauds your decision to leave immediately for Rwanda and Burundi. Your presence could result in many lives being saved as well as in focusing local and international attention on the human rights violations that underlie current or impending violence in these countries.

In response to a request from David Johnson of your staff, I have arranged for my colleague Eric Gillet to supply you with the report of the International Commission to Investigate Human Rights Abuses in Rwanda since October 1990. A similar commission has investigated violations in Burundi since the assassination of President Ndadaye; its report is in preparation. Mr. Gillet, who participated in both commissions, wrote to you last Friday about contacts with authorities in Rwanda and Burundi on human rights issues. I agree completely with his suggestions and wish to add some additional information.

Our reports indicate that Justin Mugenzi, head of the Liberal Party-Power and Matthieu Ndirumpatse, President of the MRND, play a leading role in decisions now being made by the self-appointed Rwandan government, including those relating to human rights violations. In fact, a leading military figure told us that Ndirumpatse was the one person who could free the 300 or so civilians under siege at the Hotel Milles Collines in Kigali. Both Mugenzi and Ndirumpatse are now in Nairobi. Should you be able to see them during your time in Nairobi, such a contact might prove productive in improving the situation in Rwanda. After your return to Europe, you might also seek to contact Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, president of the CDR party, who was recently in Paris.

Civilian members of the so-called government, such as Prime Minister Jean Kambanda, apparently are powerless figureheads. Your time would be better spent with such powerful military leaders as

General Augustin Bizimungu, chief of staff

Gen. Bizimana, Minister of Defense

Col. Bagosora

Col. Mpiranya, head of the Presidential Guard

Captain Pascal Simbikangwa and Col. Nkundiye, who effectively direct the citizen militia.

Our information indicates that it is they in conjunction with extremist politicians who are directing the massacre of civilians.



KENNETH ROTH, Executive Director · CYNTHIA BROWN, Program Director · HOLLY J. BURKHALTER, Advocacy Director
CARA LAMARCHE, Associate Director · JUAN E. MÉNDEZ, General Counsel · SUSAN OSNOS, Communications Director
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Human Rights Watch is a not-for-profit corporation monitoring and promoting human rights in Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East, and among the signatories of the Helsinki accords.

Were you able to see moderate military leaders, you might be able to encourage them to work more effectively to end the massacres and other human rights abuses. They would include:

General Rusatira
General Gatsinzi
Col. Ndindilimana.

It is essential that both those responsible for the killing of civilians and those who oppose them understand the widespread international revulsion at this slaughter. I am sure that you can be an effective spokesman in making this clear to both groups. They must realize that the massacres will not be ignored, that no regime born from such violence should hope for international assistance, and that the defenders of human rights are determined to bring those responsible for the slaughter to justice.

In addition to insisting that the killings in general must stop, you might press for action in particular on behalf of groups of civilians now at the mercy of militia and military. These would include:

- 1) The 300 or so trapped at the Hotel Milles Collines in Kigali
- 2) The 5,000 or so held prisoner at the stadium in Cyangugu in southwestern Rwanda; according to the Archbishop of Bukavu, just across the border from Cyangugu, the people in that stadium have been imprisoned there since April 15 with virtually no food or water; groups are removed at regular intervals to be assassinated
- 3) Clergy and lay people trapped at the bishopric of Butare and at the Karubanda seminary in Butare
- 4) Nuns of the Franciscan and other congregations trapped at several locations in Butare and Cyangugu.

The community of human rights activists, once flourishing in Rwanda, has lost many of its leaders. They have been killed or driven into exile abroad. We understand, however, that the Abbé André Sibomana, editor of Rwanda's largest newspaper Kinyamateka and a founding member and vice-president of the human rights league ADL, is still alive. We are told that he has taken refuge at the bishopric of Kabgayi. If you were able to contact him, a conversation with him would certainly provide you with ample information on recent events and would serve the additional important purpose of encouraging Sibomana and other embattled defenders of human rights.

Reports of massacres by militia and military in zones controlled by the Rwandan government forces abound and are convincing in their number, detail, and variety of sources of origin. Reports of abuses in the RPF zone have begun to surface but are far fewer and less convincing. We do not believe the RPF has been guilty of mass slaughter of civilians, although they themselves admit they have killed civilians who have joined with Rwandan army troops to attack them in combat situations. We also have indications that the RPF may be guilty of performing or permitting crowds of angry Rwandans to perform summary execution of people accused of being leaders of militia groups at Rukomo and at Kinyami, both southwest of Byumba. Would you please press RPF authorities on these issues when you meet with them? It is of the greatest importance that such violations as summary executions or the beginnings of more general killings of civilians be criticized promptly and forcefully.

The RPF declared last weekend that it would oppose any U.N. or other international force that attempted to interpose itself between the two warring armies. We have pressed for clarification of this statement and have been told that the RPF would not oppose an international force meant to assist in humanitarian missions, in the defense of

civilians or in protecting human rights monitors. They have repeatedly invited such monitors to areas that they control. It might be productive to raise with them the question of protection for U.N. human rights monitors if they were deployed. Are they, in fact, prepared to accept U.N. troops for the purpose of defending the monitors?

RPF representatives in Brussels, New York and Washington have indicated to me that they are determined to destroy the extremists so that they will not be forced by the international community to deal with them in negotiations or in a transitional government. They are bitter that emphasis on inclusion of all players--a policy strongly favored by the United States and others over the past two years--has worked in favor of the extremists and they fear that it will do so again. We have stressed that those responsible for the slaughter can be dealt with through the judicial process. Admittedly the Rwandan courts as presently staffed would be inadequate to such a task, but there are other possibilities: an international assistance program of judicial and prosecutorial experts who could assist Rwandan court authorities, an exceptional jurisdiction within the Rwandan system, an international tribunal. In addition, several of our colleagues have already begun the work necessary to bring some of the key figures to justice through the courts in Belgium or France, both in civil and in criminal proceedings. It would be most helpful if you could reassure the RPF that it will be possible to try and punish those guilty for the massacres through one mechanism or another.

It would be most helpful if you could travel as much as possible through the countryside. Perhaps you could go by car from Kigali to Bujumbura. Merely the fact that you are passing in the vicinity might help to end or avert massacres in such devastated regions as Butare. I am confident that all players would be most concerned about insuring your personal safety within their zones of control.

In Burundi, your visit will provide support and encouragement for those moderates who are trying to avoid further violence. In addition to talks with military and civilian authorities, we would suggest that you make contact with ITEKA, the Burundi human rights league (tel. 228636). Its president is Tarcisse Nsavyimana and its executive secretary is Joseph Mujiji, but by far the most responsible and best-informed person associated with the group is one of its founders, Eugen Nindorera (222915). ITEKA worked effectively with the International Commission and provides credible information. Its major problem is that it has been increasingly identified as a Tutsi organization, even though its president Nsavyimana is a Hutu. It has in fact been far more active in documenting abuses against Tutsi, but in part this is because Hutu distrust an organization that is largely staffed by Tutsi and hence refuse to bring their complaints to the group. As far as we know, there is no other human rights group that responds primarily to the needs of the Hutu. SONERA, the one other organization, is even more narrowly Tutsi in its interests.

In talking with Burundi authorities, it would be important to gather their accounts of the violence in Bujumbura in early March (surrounding the search for arms in Hutu parts of the city) and again one week ago.

Were you able to leave Bujumbura, you should visit the tense regions of the north such as Kirundo. Nindorera and others can pinpoint where your visits could do the most good.

In both Rwanda and Burundi, the radio has played a key role in inciting violence. It could be used to play a comparable role in encouraging tolerance. It would be most important for you to insist that statements by you condemning violence and explaining the purpose of your visit be broadcast in both countries. In Rwanda, you should insist that your statement be read not just on the national Radio Rwanda, but also on the private Radio

des Milles Collines, which has been most responsible for encouraging people to kill Tutsi. The statements should be broadcast in Kirundi and Kinyarwanda as well as in French. You should be sure that the translation into the local language is done by a reliable interpreter and that some similarly reliable person listen to be sure the broadcast accurately reflects the statement you have made.

I hope that this information will arrive in time to be of some use to you. Please let me know if I can provide any further information or be of help to you in any other way. For the rest of Sunday, I am at telephone 716-881-2758 and fax 716-885-6008. Monday and Tuesday I will be at the Human Rights Watch office in New York, tel. 212-972-8400 and fax 212-972-0905. On Wednesday I expect to be in the Washington office telephone 202-371-6592 and fax 202-371-0124.

Sincerely,


Alison L. Des Forges

P.S. I have just heard that some priests of the congregation of White Fathers may have information about abuses in the RPF zone. They are Father Joachim Vallmajo, who is at Byumba, and three priests at Nyagahanga, including the cure of the parish, Father Luca.