

Medieval civil war raging in Burundi as OAU calls for peacekeepers

Annie Thomas

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BUJUMBURA, Oct 29 (AFP) - A "medieval" civil war is raging in Burundi, a top Red Cross official said here Friday as neighbouring heads of government called for U.N. peacekeepers to stop the tribal bloodshed.

"Farms and houses are burning, cattle have been slaughtered," Philippe Gaillard of the International Committee of the Red Cross told AFP.

The violence between the minority Tutsi tribe, who dominate the army that killed President Melchior Ndadaye in last week's coup attempt, and the majority Hutu tribe - to which Ndadaye belonged - has spiralled into a vicious cycle of revenge killing, Gaillard said.

"It is a medieval civil war," he said. "People are fighting with stones, spears, clubs and the army with much more effective weapons."

Gaillard estimated the death toll to be in the thousands if not tens of

thousands.

Nearly 600,000 Burundians have fled to neighbouring states, more than half to Rwanda, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees' spokeswoman Silvana Foa said in Geneva Friday.

The UNHCR had released five million dollars from its emergency funds to help the refugees in Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire, Foa added.

In Bujumbura Friday, civil servants returned to their offices, shops opened and market traders laid out their goods for the first time since the October 21 coup bid.

About a thousand people demonstrated for an international peacekeeping force. Led by Ndadaye's Burundi Democratic Front, the demonstrators also demanded the reorganisation of the army.

Military police arrested six soldiers for taking part in the putsch, bringing the total of such detainees

up to about 15, a government spokesman said. Some 20 coup plotters are believed to have fled. AFP AFP