

UN to appoint a human rights monitor to Burundi

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GENEVA, March 9 (AFP) - The UN Human Rights Commission agreed Thursday to appoint a human rights monitor for the tiny central African state of Burundi after member states and aid groups warned of a possible bloodbath.

The commission called unanimously on its president to name a special rapporteur to monitor the human rights situation in Burundi following what it said was months of mounting tension between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi.

The commission, meeting in Geneva, said it was vital to send someone quickly to help prevent a conflagration.

Highlighting the growing conflict in the country, witnesses said Thursday some 30 people have been killed in northern Burundi since the start of the week in clashes that observers fear could lead to the sorts of massacres seen in the past here and echoing the

genocide in neighbouring Rwanda.

The commission praised the efforts of the Organisation of African Unity and the aid groups to stabilise the situation but said it recognised the need to send more rights monitors.

Burundi achieved independence from Belgium in 1962 but since then has been ruled by the ethnic minority Tutsi group. Rebellions by the Hutu majority were put down with extreme violence on at least two occasions and in October 1993 a failed coup by the Tutsi-led army against the country's first Hutu president led to some 50,000 people being killed.

Burundi's next president, Cyprien Ntaryamira, was killed in the plane crash that set off the massacres in Rwanda last April. Since then, moderate Hutu and Tutsi politicians have attempted to dampen ethnic tension but Hutu and Tutsi extremists, the latter allegedly linked to the army,

have caused increasing tension with regular attacks on rival communities.

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