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## Human Rights Abuses in Rwanda (1990-1993)

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REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES  
IN RWANDA SINCE OCTOBER 1, 1990

Since the beginning of the war in October 1990, more than 2,000 civilian victims, largely of the minority Tutsi people, have been systematically massacred in Rwanda. Large numbers of officials have been implicated in directing these killings but only two have been removed from their positions and neither one of them has stood trial for his crimes.

Armed militias of the political parties, especially of the former single party, the MRND, and its ally, the CDR, are permitted to terrorize people in many parts of the country with no effective reaction from officials responsible for public security.

According to the International Commission, which has just completed an investigation in Rwanda, these abuses result from a deliberate policy of the regime, directed against both the minority Tutsi and its political opponents. President Juvénal Habyarimana and his immediate entourage are ultimately responsible for these abuses.

The Rwandan army massacred between 500 and 1,000 Bahima, a people related to the Tutsi, in the region of Mutara at the beginning of the war; these people, who were destroyed as they fled their homes because they were accused of being "accomplices" of the invading force of the RPF. In another incident, the Rwandan army killed 11 RPF soldiers after they had surrendered and laid down their arms. In still other incidents, soldiers have killed those targeted by civilian authorities as enemies, either in military camps or by assassinating them at their homes.

The soldiers of the RPF have also been guilty of violating humanitarian law. Displaced persons testified to having witnessed summary executions of family members carried out by RPF soldiers. Others displayed the scars of wounds received from RPF soldiers. Still others related having seen people kidnapped by the RPF, probably to be taken to Uganda. At the health center of Nyarurama, RPF soldiers killed seven patients, 5 of them children, in December 1991. They have also destroyed and pillaged the property of civilians.

The International Commission

The abuses in Rwanda were documented by an independent International Commission that included ten jurists and specialists of eight different nationalities. The Commission was sponsored by four non-governmental human rights organizations: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, New York; the Inter-African Union of Human Rights, Ouagadougou; the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, Montreal; and the International Federation of Human Rights, Paris. The Commission was established in response to an urgent request from five Rwandan human rights activists.

The Commission based its report on investigations carried out in Rwanda from January 7 to January 21, 1993. It collected oral and written testimony from hundreds of witnesses and gathered substantial and diverse written documentation including administrative reports, judicial records and official correspondence.

Systematic Massacres

Attacks against the Tutsi of Kibilira commune cost hundreds of lives and destroyed virtually all the property of many other people. Local and regional authorities instigated and directed these attacks. The attacks were repeated in March 1992 as well as at the end of December 1992.

From the end of January to mid-March 1991 massacres decimated the Bagogwe, a sub-group of Tutsi who live scattered throughout northwestern Rwanda. An estimated 500 people were killed, with young men being the principal targets. The military and nearby military camps were the principal instigators of these killings, with the

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active assistance of local authorities. Elsewhere local authorities ordered people to kill their neighbors, telling them this was part of their unuganda or communal work obligation.

The tragedy of the Bagogwe was hidden for some time because the authorities were able to isolate the region since it was a combat zone and thus to continue ignoring the reports of massacres. The Commission discovered irrefutable evidence of massacres: it located and excavated mass graves, one in Kinigi in the backyard of a local government official, another in Mutura, where the bodies of ten victims had been dumped. These discoveries support assertions that there are other such to be found in numerous places.

In March 1992 several hundred Tutsi were massacred in the region of Bugesera. Many houses were burned and 15,000 people had to flee to shelter in churches and so on. The operation was directed by the local government official, assisted by forces of the Interahamwe, a militia of the former single party, the MRND. In addition soldiers from the military camp of Gako, disguised in civilian clothes, attacked the local people, following after a uniformed patrol that disarmed and dispersed the people had gathered together in groups for self-defense.

These attacks were timed to coincide in several areas at once; the same pretext for the attacks were used from one to another; a very significant number of officials both civilian and military, were implicated; with only two exceptions, no guilty civilians have been removed and no attackers, even those who confessed their guilt have been brought to trial or punished; all this evidence led the Commission to conclude that the attacks resulted from a deliberate policy put into effect at the very highest levels. The objective of this policy of exacerbating tensions between Hutu and Tutsi is to attempt to strengthen the power base of the regime among Hutu and to provide an excuse for slowing down the process of democratic reform.

#### The Reseau Zero and the Climate of Terror

The armed party militias, especially the Interahamwe of the MRND, have carried out political killings and have created a permanent state of fear in many parts of the country by pillaging and destroying the homes of supporters of other parties. They have set up illegal barriers on public roads where they extort money from or administer beatings to Tutsi or political opponents who attempt to pass. With the growth of the Interahamwe, other parties have also created their own militias that sometimes exact exactions on members of parties opposed to their own. Rwanda has thus been launched on a downward spiral of violence where parties increasingly are using force to achieve their political ends. These militias are clearly forbidden by the law on political parties, yet the government has not disbanded them.

The testimony gathered by the Commission confirms the existence of a circle of twenty or so people around the President who organize massacres, confrontations with the opposition and assassinations. According to some witnesses, the head of state himself participates regularly in the meetings of this secret organization, called the Reseau Zero.

Without any doubt the highest state authorities are inciting Rwandans to hate and attack each other. This discourse of hate has strongly influenced the behavior of local and regional authorities, the army and the population itself.

#### The Total Misery of the Displaced

A large part of the Rwandan population has fled the war zone and now survives in total misery in camps for the displaced. Hundreds of thousands have suffered in intolerable conditions for many months, some for as long as two and a half years. Hundreds of thousands more have had to flee following the recent violation of the ceasefire by the RPF. At the present time about one of every seven Rwandans is a displaced person.

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**Events since January 21**

The Commission ended its investigation with its departure from Rwanda on January 21. Beginning the next day, it heard of new massacres in northwestern Rwanda and of summary executions, including that of one of its witnesses. Since the renewal of combat on February 8, the charges of violations by both the Rwandan government and the RPF have multiplied. Given what the Commission learned, its members are not surprised that the cycle of violence appears to be continuing and indeed, getting worse. Since the Commission itself has had no opportunity to investigate these charges, however, it makes no judgment on the validity of the accusations but merely expresses the hope that some of the charges will prove to be at the least exaggerated if not totally without foundation.

**Recommendations of the Commission**

**To the President of Rwanda:**

- that he speak out clearly and sincerely in favor of peace and human rights
- that he condemn publicly and sincerely all cases of communal violence, whether attacks against Tutsi or against members of a given party
- that he fulfill his responsibility to guarantee the security of all citizens without distinction, and ensure that his subordinates do the same
- that he insist upon the prosecution and punishment of guilty officials
- that he immediately dissolve the armed militia Interahamwe of his own party

**To the Government of Rwanda:**

- that they dissolve all party militia
- that they prosecute and punish guilty officials
- that they provide for restitution or compensation to victims for loss of property or damage to their persons
- that they reintegrate employees who lost their positions following illegal detentions
- that they pursue the investigations of mass graves begun by the International Commission

**To the Rwandan Patriotic Front:**

- that they cease summary executions, kidnapping of civilians, and the pillage and destruction of property
- that they stop attacking civilian targets
- that they halt removing groups of people in Uganda
- that they punish those responsible for abuses

**To the international community:**

- that they condition further economic aid on an improvement in the respect for human rights and an end to abuses described in this report
- that they cease providing military aid to both belligerents
- that they encourage both parties to continue negotiations for peace at Arusha and press for implementation of the accords reached there.