

Burundi (1993 - 2006)

The recent civil war between Burundi's ethnic Hutu rebels and the Tutsi-dominated army began in 1993 and ended in 2006, when the last of several rebel groups agreed to join the government and integrate its forces into the national army. During the conflict an estimated 1.2 million Burundians have been displaced and 300,000 killed. Both the army and rebel forces have used child soldiers, and fighters have raped thousands of women. Unlike the genocide in neighboring Rwanda, the fighting in Burundi is between organized armed groups, although it is civilians who have borne the brunt of the conflict.

Burundi has a troubled history. In 1965, Hutu army officers attempted a coup against the Tutsi-dominated government that came to power at the end of Belgian colonial rule. When the coup attempt failed, Hutu civilians were subjected to violent repression and most Hutu were purged from the army. In 1972, in retaliation for massacres of Tutsis, the government organized the murder of an estimated 150,000 Hutus, forcing hundreds of thousands of others into exile. Hutu in exile formed opposition movements based in neighboring Rwanda and Tanzania. Leadership challenges led to splits within these groups, and several factions emerged.

In 1988, tensions in the northern provinces erupted into violent conflict and new massacres of Hutu. The violence sparked internal and external pressures for change. An open letter signed by a group of Hutu intellectuals condemned government repression and called for an end to ethnic discrimination and political reforms to achieve egalitarian representation. The government of Tutsi president Buyoya also came under pressure to reform from neighboring states and the West.

In 1992, Buyoya altered the constitution to permit multi-party elections, and the Hutu-dominated political party, FRODEBU, achieved electoral success in June 1993. When Tutsi soldiers assassinated the new civilian Hutu president in October 1993, armed Hutu groups retaliated against Tutsi civilians. By the end of the year, Hutu rebels were engaged in full-scale battles with the Burundi army. In 1994, the newly appointed FRODEBU president, Cyprien Ntaryamira, was killed along with Rwandan president Habyarimana when their plane was shot down. This event triggered the genocide in Rwanda, where Hutu militias killed approximately 800,000 civilians, most of them Tutsis.

In 1996, with army backing, Buyoya returned to power in a coup. He began negotiations with the Frodebu-dominated parliament to create a transitional government to conduct peace talks with the Hutu rebels. Former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere began mediating talks in Arusha in 1998. After Nyerere's death in 1999, former South African president Nelson Mandela took over as mediator. The peace talks culminated in the Arusha Agreement, which was signed by all but two rebel factions in 2000.

The Arusha Agreement provided for a transition to multi-party government. A new government was formed that included representatives from various political parties and rebel groups, and a new multi-ethnic Burundi army was established drawing forces from rebel groups as well as the former government army. The African Union (AU) deployed a peacekeeping force to Burundi in early 2003 to begin disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating rebel and army forces, and to assist the return of refugees. In June 2004 the UN took over peacekeeping duties. The UN mission ended in December 2006 and a reduced AU-mandated South African force remains to facilitate the demobilization.



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Print Resources

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Ngaruko, Floribert and Janvier Desire Nkurunziza (2000) "An Economic Interpretation of Conflict in Burundi," *Journal of African Economies* 9(3), pp. 370-409.

United Nations Security Council (2004). *Report of the Secretary-General on Burundi*. S/2004/210. 16 March 2004.

Online Resources

International Crisis Group (2006) Conflict History: Burundi.

Human Rights Watch (2003) *Everyday Victims: Civilians in the Burundian War.*

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BBC News *Country Profile: Burundi*

Timeline

1962 - Burundi becomes independent from Belgium

1965 - Hutu soldiers attempt coup; mass ethnic repression follows

1972 - ethnic massacres

1986 - Hutu-dominated political party FRODEBU formed

1987 - coup brings Pierre Buyoya to power

1988 - thousands of Hutu massacred

1992 - new constitution creates multi-party state

1993 - FRODEBU candidate Melchior Ndadaye wins presidential election in June, becoming first Hutu and civilian president; he is assassinated by army in October; massacres ensue

1994 - new Hutu president Cyprien Ntaryamira dies in plane crash; Rwandan genocide; Sylvestre Ntibantuganya (of FRODEBU) takes over

1996 - Buyoya stages coup; African governments place sanctions on Burundi

1998 - FRODEBU and Buyoya negotiate power sharing; Arusha talks begin

2000 - Arusha Agreement signed by most parties creates transitional government

2003 - African Union establishes peacekeeping force composed of South African troops, begins troop demobilization and reintegration into new multi-ethnic army

2006 - last rebel group (FNL) signs ceasefire agreement