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Commission de l'immigration
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Burundi: Treatment of Tutsis, in particular, young Tutsis, by the authorities; their treatment at the ports of entry (April 2015 - November 2015)

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1. Political Context

Sources state that Burundi has been in a crisis since the Burundian president, Pierre Nkurunziza, announced his decision in April 2015 to run for a third term (The Independent 14 Nov. 2015; International Crisis Group 24 Aug. 2015). Demonstrations to protest this decision took place from April to June 2015 in the capital, Bujumbura (ibid.; AI 24 Aug. 2015, 3). In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, the Executive Secretary of the Human Rights League in the Great Lakes Region (Ligue des droits de la personne dans la région des Grands Lacs, LDGL), a group of 25 NGOs who monitor and document human rights violations in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, states that young people [translation] "were active" in those demonstrations (LDGL 24 Nov. 2015). According to an article published by a research director at the Institute for International and Strategic Relations (Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques, IRIS), an independent think tank founded in France in 1991 that provides research and analysis services to public and private organizations (IRIS n.d), the protesters were mainly young people from Bujumbura, supported by the 18 opposition parties (IRIS 13 Nov. 2015). The blog post on a round table of 15 May 2015 by the Oxford Central Africa Forum to examine the crisis in Burundi states that, according to a researcher from the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford, so far

[t]he protesters mostly come from the city [of Bujumbura,] but they have included both Hutu and Tutsi, a lot of young people and students and also, on some days, women and middle-aged people (CSAE 12 June 2015).

Sources state that the demonstrations were [translation] "brutally suppressed" (Human Rights Watch 10 Nov. 2015; International Crisis Group 24 Aug. 2015). Amnesty International (AI) states that the police [AI English version] "used excessive and disproportionate force [among other things], including lethal force" (AI 24 Aug. 2015, 3). According to sources, the demonstrations led to the deaths of nearly one hundred people (International Crisis Group 24 Aug. 2015; The Observer 10 Sept. 2015).

Sources state that after the May 2015 military coup attempt, the security forces' crackdown intensified (The Huffington Post 12 Nov. 2015; Human Rights Watch 10 Nov. 2015). For further information on the May 2015 coup attempt in Burundi, please consult Response to Information Request BDI105338.

According to International Crisis Group, after the presidential election [of July 2015 (The Huffington Post 12 Nov. 2015)], which returned Pierre Nkurunziza to power, [translation] "[t]he violence changed," and there was an emergence "of daily targeted killings in the city and in the province" (24 Aug. 2015). A joint report published in October 2015 by the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH), the Burundian League for Human Rights (Ligue burundaise des droits de l'homme, Ligue ITEKA) and the LDGL, states that,

[translation]

in terms of security, there has been an increased number of targeted killings, summary and extrajudicial executions, and arrests and arbitrary detentions since the end of July 2015 (FIDH et al. 9 Oct. 2015, 2).

According to sources, in November 2015, the crisis in Burundi was assessed at over 200 deaths (The New York Times 12 Nov. 2015; The East African 14 Nov. 2015). Nearly 200,000 people fled to neighbouring countries (ibid.; The Washington Post 13 Nov. 2015). Voice of America (VOA) states that "observers are now concerned about the possibility of another civil war between the country's ethnic Tutsis and Hutus" in Burundi (VOA 12 Nov. 2015).

2. Treatment of Tutsis by the Authorities

In an article published in May 2015, the British daily The Telegraph states that Tutsis living in the north of Burundi stated that they received, from members of the Imbonerakure [a militia allied with the President's party (IBT 28 May 2015)], letters threatening them with death if they opposed the third term of Pierre Nkurunziza; the Imbonerakure apparently denied these accusations (5 May 2015). Similarly, International Business Times (IBT) states that, in May 2015, for similar reasons, members of the Imbonerakure made death threats against Tutsis living in the refugee camp in Bugendana, in the centre of Burundi (28 May 2015). In addition, the Research Director at IRIS states that [translation] "a number of abuses were committed against the ex-[Armed Forces of Burundi (Forces armées du Burundi, FAB)], the Tutsi officials in the army" (13 Nov. 2015). IRIN cites the statements of the President of the Burundian League for Human Rights (Ligue burundaise des droits de l'homme), who states that [translation] "there has been an increase in the suppression of the members of the ex-FAB who are accused of committing the murders of the police officers and soldiers in Bujumbura" (IRIN 13 Oct. 2015). IRIN states however that the [translation] "upsurge of murders" targeted Tutsi and Hutu military leaders (ibid.).

According to the Telegraph, "Tutsis are being targeted because they are perceived as supporters of the opposition" to President Nkurunziza (5 May 2015). Similarly, the Executive Secretary of LDGL states that Tutsis were

[translation]

considered to be the instigators of all demonstrations against the [third] term of the [Burundian president] and [that] most of the targeted killings were directed at unknown

Tutsis, civil society actors and political actors (LDGL 24 Nov. 2015).

However, during a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a conflict prevention and risk analysis researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Nairobi stated that both Tutsis and Hutus were targeted by the authorities in the context of the actual crisis in Burundi (Researcher 23 Nov. 2015). She stated that, until now, the reasons for the [translation] "attacks and arrests" perpetrated by the authorities were not "exclusively ethnic" (ibid.). According to her, the targets were instead chosen based on their political affiliation and their position with respect to the third term of the President (ibid.). Two other researchers at the University of Oxford stated at the round table on the crisis in Burundi that "the conflict is not framed in ethnic terms," because "ethnic divisions do not necessarily overlap with political divisions, which are at the epicentre of the current crisis" (CSAE 12 June 2015).

However, the Researcher stated that the Burundian government had, for political reasons, made statements accusing Tutsis of being [translation] "the only source of the attack" (Researcher 23 Nov. 2015). Similarly, according to the Research Director at IRIS, the Burundian authorities, including President Nkurunziza and the President of the Senate, made statements [translation] "of hatred", coated in "genocidal language used in 1994 by the Hutu power in Rwanda" (IRIS 13 Nov. 2015).

2.1 Treatment of Tutsis at the Ports of Entry

With respect to whether the officers at the ports of entry pay particular attention to the ethnicity of Burundians returning to the country, the Executive Secretary of the LDGL responded, without providing further details, that immigration officers in Burundi were [translation] "very particular" about the ethnicity issue (24 Nov. 2015). However, the ISS researcher states that, according to her, the authorities did not pay particular attention to the ethnic origin of Burundians who reentered the country (Researcher 23 Nov. 2015). However, she added that [translation] "young people were stopped at the border," because of suspicions about their political affiliation, "to avoid their joining the rebellion" (ibid.).

Further information on the treatment of Tutsis at the ports of entry could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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