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Burundi: Internally displaced Burundians should not be forgotten during the peacebuilding process

Despite a marked improvement in the security situation in Burundi in recent years, some 100,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) remain in settlements throughout the country, in addition to an unknown number living with host families. Many IDPs seem to have to a large extent integrated into the communities of neighbouring towns and villages, but there is little information on their situation, their needs or their aspirations.

In the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Burundians fled their homes to escape fighting between the government and Hutu rebel groups seeking to put an end to the political dominance of the Tutsi minority. Many others, predominantly Hutus, were forcibly displaced into camps by the government in the second half of the 1990s. Following the signing of a ceasefire between the government and a major rebel group in 2003, as well as the voting into power of a national unity government in 2005, hundreds of thousands of refugees and IDPs returned to their homes.

The last remaining rebel group, the Palipehutu-FNL, signed a ceasefire agreement with the government in 2006, but sporadic attacks continued. In April 2008, heavy fighting between the Palipehutu-FNL and the government occurred in and around the capital, causing the death of more than 30 people and the temporary displacement of many more.

Since 2006, the UN Peace Building Commission has been working with the Burundian government to support post-conflict recovery, including the recovery of people affected by the country's internal armed conflicts. In a briefing to the Commission, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said that peacebuilding success could be measured by the successful return and full integration of refugees and IDPs. So far however, the situation of long-term IDPs has not improved markedly. Success in responding to the needs of these people will depend on a coordinated approach as well as on more accurate information on IDPs' needs and aspirations. OCHA is planning to leave the country in June 2008, and it is important for UNHCR or another agency to take the lead on IDPs.

Map of Burundi



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Source: United Nations Cartographic Section

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

Background of displacement and political developments

Since the independence of their country in 1962, hundreds of thousands of Hutu and Tutsi Burundians have been killed in massacres carried out by members of the Hutu majority or the Tutsi elite minority. Millions more have at various times fled their homes for fear of the killing. The violence has been fuelled by regional and ethnic tensions, as well as economic inequalities. In 1993, large-scale displacement followed the assassination of the first elected president, Melchior Ndadaye, and subsequent massacres. At first, the majority of IDPs were ethnic Tutsi, particularly in the northern and central provinces, who feared retaliation from neighbours following the assassination of the Hutu president. From 1996, as conflict escalated, both ethnic Tutsi and Hutu found refuge in settlements, especially in the south. The Tutsi-led government also ordered the relocation of hundreds of thousands of (mostly Hutu) civilians into “regroupment camps” twice in the late 1990s, as part of a military strategy against the rebel groups. The number of IDPs peaked in 1999, with over 800,000 displaced, or around 12 per cent of the population (UN CAP, November 1999, p.6).

While regroupment camps were dismantled in 2000 following international pressure, other IDP settlements remained. The same year, a peace agreement was signed in Arusha, Tanzania, by the government, opposition parties and opposition armed groups. Large-scale displacement continued, however, as the army continued to fight two rebel groups which had not joined the peace process. In 2003, the bigger of the two remaining groups, the Forces for the Defence of

Democracy-National Coalition for the Defence of Democracy (*Forces pour la défense de la démocratie-Coalition nationale pour la défense de la démocratie*, FDD-CNDD), signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burundian government. Improved security allowed for the return of tens of thousands of IDPs to their homes (OCHA, 26 May 2005).

A national unity government headed by President Pierre Nkurunziza, a Hutu and former head of the rebel movement FDD, was elected in August 2005 in the first democratic election since the start of the conflict in 1993. The last remaining rebel group, the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People-National Liberation Forces (*Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu-Forces nationales de libération*, Palipehutu-FNL), fought on before finally signing a comprehensive ceasefire agreement with the government in September 2006. Security improved following the agreement, but worsened again in mid-2007, when the Palipehutu-FNL withdrew from the mechanism established to monitor the ceasefire, alleging bias on the part of the facilitator, a South African minister. In April 2008, the Palipehutu-FNL was brought back to the negotiating table after intense diplomatic pressure from the international community, but continued to fight against the government (ISS, 3 April 2008).

New displacement

Since the ceasefire agreement in 2006, several thousand people have been displaced, most of them temporarily, by fighting between government forces (FDN) and the Palipehutu-FNL. The Palipehutu-FNL has mostly caused insecurity in its strongholds of the provinces of Cibitoke, Bubanza and Bujumbura Ru-

ral. Early in 2008, at least 8,000 people were displaced in the north-western province of Bubanza (IRIN, 14 January 2008). In mid-April 2008, outside the capital, residents were spending the nights in the bush for fear of being caught in Palipehutu-FNL attacks on military positions in and around Bujumbura which killed more than 30 people (IRIN, 23 April 2008).

Several thousand people were temporarily displaced by natural disasters in 2006 and 2007, in particular due to drought leading to food shortages, and floods. In addition, at least 20,000 Burundians who had been living in Tanzania for years without being recognised as refugees have been expelled to Burundi, many of them without a home to go back to (OCHA, 3 October 2007).

Long-term IDPs

Some 100,000 people remained displaced as of the end of April 2008. This estimate is based on the last comprehensive IDP survey undertaken by the UN in 2005 (OCHA, 23 June 2005). According to the survey, some 117,000 IDPs were in settlements, many of which had grown to become like villages. This number did not take into account people living with host families, particularly in urban centres and in Bujumbura Rural and Bubanza Provinces. The majority of IDPs were living in the northern and central provinces.

According to a survey on IDPs in southern provinces released by UNHCR in January 2008, the majority of people still in settlements fled armed clashes between 1993 and 2000. Others include those who fled due to natural disasters (floods and drought), returnees from Tanzania, as

well as Batwa communities who found better living conditions and access to land in the settlements (UNHCR, 1 January 2008). Except for this recent survey, current information on IDPs in Burundi is only anecdotal. In order to devise durable solutions, the conditions facing IDPs in the settlements and dispersed in the countryside need to be re-evaluated, focusing on their current needs and aspirations.

At least 389,000 Burundian refugees had returned to Burundi by March 2008 (UNHCR, 1 April 2008). Many of them are landless and do not have a home to return to (UNHCR, 31 March 2008). Meanwhile, according to local observers, few long-term IDPs have returned home over the past two years. Many of them have reportedly integrated into communities in neighbouring towns and villages to a large extent, and their living conditions may now be better than prior to displacement. The major exception is women-headed households, which are generally still extremely vulnerable. Remaining obstacles to return or to resettlement include the reported impunity of many who have killed civilians and still allegedly live in the IDPs' places of origin; continued insecurity and difficult economic conditions in areas of origin; and the high population density of the country (UNHCR, 1 January 2008; OCHA, 26 May 2005, 3 October 2007).

Physical security

Overall, the physical security of IDPs has improved significantly since the height of the conflict. But IDPs, like other people, remain subject to high level of violence by both armed men in uniform and civilian gangs. Some 80 per cent of households in the capital and in other large towns possess small arms, a significant

Testimony of Colleta Cimpaye, 54, displaced from her home since 1993, following the assassination of President Ndadaye (ActionAid, 17 March 2008)

“Someone looked out and saw people running towards us with machetes, knives and guns,” Fourteen years later she still lives with her five children in a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs).

“I’ve lost so many people I can hardly count,” says Colleta. “My husband. My brother. His wife. Their children. My sister. Her eight children. We once were 12 brothers and sisters. Now we are only two.”

factor in the continuing high level of violence (UNSC, 27 October 2006; UNDP, November 2004).

The UN estimates that 19 per cent of Burundian adolescent girls and women have been victims of sexual violence (OCHA, 2006, p13). Minors are particularly at risk. In December 2006, 60 per cent of reported rapes were committed against children (AI, 9 October 2007). Both rebel groups and the government have recruited child soldiers, many of them displaced children. Some 3,000 child soldiers were demobilised from 2003 to 2006, but according to a UN report to the UN Security Council, reports of rape, sexual violence, abduction and detention of children and child recruitment by the Palipehutu-FNL increased in 2006/2007 (UNSC, 28 November 2007).

Humanitarian conditions

The humanitarian needs of IDPs are now very similar to those of other vulnerable Burundians. Limitations to their access to basic services are due to financial constraints rather than the fact of having been displaced. Some 600,000 Burundians remain in need of food aid in 2008 (IRIN, 7 March 2008). The first cause of mortality in Burundi is malaria, while respiratory infections and diarrhoea also claim the lives of many children under five. Another leading killer among IDPs and others is HIV/AIDS. In 2006, a new policy of free medical care for all Burundian mothers and children caused existing medical structures to be overwhelmed by a wave of demand. Thanks to significant donor support to this initiative, however, crude mortality indicators then showed some improvement (Burundian MoH, December 2006).

Primary school fees were abolished in 2005, resulting in a 50 per cent increase in enrolment for first graders in all provinces compared to the previous school year. Some 150,000 first graders were left out, as classes were too crowded to accommodate them (OCHA, 2006; UN, 30 November 2006). In 2007, the lack of space in classes and distances to reach schools still limited access to education for many displaced and other children (UNHCR, 1 January 2008).

Land issues

Land for most Burundians is not only essential economically – it is the first national economic resource – but also culturally, as the family plot is generally viewed as the symbol of ethnic and family identity. The return of IDPs and refugees to their land is made difficult by

existing problems such as the high density of the population, the division of land plots into smaller lots and their poor productivity, and the exploitation of land by new occupants.

While the vast majority of IDPs in Burundi continue to access and cultivate their original land plots, unsolved land issues still complicate the return process of refugees and, to a lesser extent, of IDPs. The value of land has gone up following the improvement of insecurity, and rich individuals have bought more land, while the land available to returning IDPs and refugees has become more scarce (Mbura Kamungi et al., June 2005). IDPs also often face the theft of their crops, due to the distance between the settlements and their fields (UNSC, 18 December 2006).

Land ownership in displacement areas is especially complicated. The majority of IDPs live on state-owned, private or church-owned property, and the status of the IDPs on these properties remains unclear (UNHCR, 1 January 2008). This has led to disputes with the original owners, for example when repatriated refugees find IDPs settled on their land. In order to deal with land and property issues resulting from years of conflict, the Burundian government set up a National Land Commission in July 2006. According to local accounts, the Commission has started to deal with individual complaints, but so far it has solved very few cases.

National and international response

A Directorate General for Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration of Displaced and Repatriated Persons was created at the Ministry of National

Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender in March 2006 (IDD, 3 June 2006). The Ministry also supervises PARESI, a UNHCR-financed project which provides basic housing and infrastructure to returning IDPs and refugees, as well as to Burundians expelled from Tanzania. According to local observers however, the government is aware of the situation of long-term IDPs, but does not seem to have made the issue a priority.

The UN Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator for Burundi is responsible for ensuring a strategic and coordinated response to internal displacement in the country. He also heads the UN Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB), which was established in January 2007, after the mandate of the peacekeeping mission in the country ended. OCHA is currently the focal point on IDP issues, but it is expected to leave Burundi in June 2008. It is not clear at this point whether UNHCR or any other agency will then take the lead on IDPs. In practice, most IDP-related activities undertaken by UN agencies and NGOs are integrated into general humanitarian programmes addressing food security, health, psycho-social assistance, housing and education.

In July 2007, a Steering Commission for the Repatriation and Reintegration of Returnees was established in Burundi. The Commission comprises representatives of four ministries, donors, BINUB, UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF, with OCHA and UNDP providing its secretariat. The Commission aims to provide a coherent and integrated response to the basic needs of the returnees and displaced and expelled persons, as well as the needs of the host communities, including the

promotion of cohesion and reconciliation (UNSC, 23 November 2007).

NGOs including Ligue ITEKA, Search for Common Ground, Global Rights, Accord and NRC provide legal support and conflict mediation for IDPs and returning refugees to solve land issues in a peaceful way.

Having assessed that Burundi no longer faced an acute humanitarian crisis, the government and the UN agreed not to launch a Consolidated Appeal Process for Burundi in 2008 (UNSC, 23 November 2007). The main source of funding to improve the situation of IDPs and returnees is now the UN Peace Building Commission (PBC), created in 2006. The UN Secretary-General approved the allocation of \$35 million for Burundi, based on the “Strategic Framework for Burundi” endorsed in June 2007 (UNSC, 17 May 2007; PBC, 22 July 2007). In a briefing

to the PBC, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, said that peacebuilding success could be measured by the successful return and full integration of refugees and internally displaced persons (UNGA, 30 May 2007). One of the key objectives of the Strategic Framework is to find “sustainable solutions to the land issue and to socioeconomic recovery of populations affected by the war and conflicts,” and the Peacebuilding fund will contribute \$2 million to projects for their recovery (Government of Burundi/UN, 31 December 2007). Whether these projects will make a difference in IDPs’ lives remains to be seen.

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC’s Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org

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