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Burundi's last rebel group becomes a political party

Source: [Reuters - AlertNet](#)

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BUJUMBURA, April 22 (Reuters) - Burundi's last remaining rebel group has officially registered as a political party ahead of next year's national elections in the coffee-producing central African nation, officials said.

Integrating the Forces for National Liberation (FNL) is seen as the last hurdle for peace in Burundi, raising hopes that the tiny nation may shuck off its violent past.

"It is definitely the end of war in Burundi," FNL boss Agathon Rwasa told reporters late on Tuesday, adding that his party would now prepare for the 2010 elections.

An official at the interior ministry confirmed that the former rebels had officially become a party.

"The FNL was registered as a political party, because it has separated its military wing from the political one," said Aime Nkurunziza, chief of staff at the interior ministry.

In January, the FNL renounced violence and removed "Palipehutu" -- which means "party for the liberation of ethnic Hutus -- from its name to pave the way to becoming a party.

Political parties with tribal affiliations are outlawed in Burundi where two decades of ethnic conflict killed 300,000 people. Burundi's government and the FNL inked a peace deal in mid-2006, but tensions have remained high.

Under an agreement, 2,100 former combatants from the FNL will join the army, while the remaining 1,400 will go to the police. Thousands of former combatants will also turn over their weapons to an African Union task force.

The deal adds that 5,000 former FNL fighters will return to civilian life -- the process started with Rwasa stepping down as military commander.

(Reporting by Patrick Nduwimana, Writing by Jack Kimball; editing by Giles Elgood)

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