

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Freedom in the World - Burundi (2008)

Capital:
Bujumbura

Population:
8,500,000

Political Rights Score: 4
Civil Liberties Score: 5
Status: Partly Free

Overview

Burundi made limited progress in resolving long-standing ethnic and political cleavages and developing democratic institutions in 2007. In January, a former president was acquitted of coup-plot charges, which had been seen by many as politically inspired. A tentative peace agreement was reached with the last significant rebel group in June, and in August, the head of a truth and reconciliation commission was named. Rival parties signed an agreement in September, at least temporarily resolving a political crisis that had threatened Burundi's nascent democracy.

The minority Tutsi ethnic group governed this small African country for most of the period since independence from Belgium in 1962. The military, judiciary, educational system, business sector, and news media have also traditionally been dominated by the Tutsi. Violence between them and the majority Hutu has broken out repeatedly since independence. A 1992 constitution introduced multiparty politics, but the 1993 assassination of the newly elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye of the Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU) party, resulted in sustained and widespread carnage.

Ndadaye's murder fatally weakened FRODEBU's hold on power. Negotiations on power sharing took place over the succeeding months, as ethnic violence continued to rack the country. Ndadaye's successor was killed in 1994, along with Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana, when their plane was apparently shot down as it approached Kigali airport in Rwanda. This event triggered the Rwandan genocide and intensified the violence in Burundi.

Under a 1994 power-sharing arrangement between FRODEBU and the mainly Tutsi-led Unity for National Progress (UPRONA) party, Hutu politician Sylvestre Ntibantunganya served as Burundi's new president. He was ousted in a 1996 military coup led by former president Pierre Buyoya, a Tutsi whom Ndadaye had defeated in the 1993 election. Peace and political stability within the country continued to be elusive as armed insurgents sporadically staged attacks and government security forces pursued an often ruthless campaign of intimidation.

In 2000, negotiations mediated by former South African president Nelson Mandela resulted in an agreement in principle by most parties on a future democratic political solution to the conflict. Nineteen organized groups from across the political spectrum agreed to recommendations on the nature of the conflict, reforms for the nation's governing institutions, security issues, and economic restructuring and development. The specific form of the political institutions through which power

would be shared and the reform of the military proved to be especially sensitive issues. In November 2001, a transitional government was installed with Buyoya temporarily remaining chief of state and FRODEBU's Domitien Ndayizeye as vice president. The failure of key elements of two Hutu rebel groups, the Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD) and the National Liberation Forces (FNL), to participate in the transition resulted in both continued negotiations and violence.

By the end of 2002, most of the factions had agreed to stop the fighting and participate in transitional arrangements leading to national elections, initially scheduled for late 2004. In April 2003, Buyoya stepped down and was replaced as president by Ndayizeye. In October of that year, the FDD reached an agreement with the government. Progress continued in 2004, with an August agreement on the shape of new democratic institutions designed to balance the interests of the Hutu and Tutsi populations and on the holding of elections.

In 2005, Burundi achieved a major milestone by holding the first local and national elections since 1993. These resulted in a fundamental political realignment as the largely Hutu National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD), the political wing of the FDD, emerged as the country's largest party, eclipsing the traditionally dominant parties and taking 59 out of 100 seats in the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament. FRODEBU took 24 seats, and UPRONA won 10 seats. Parliament subsequently chose Pierre Nkurunziza as president, handing him 151 of the 162 votes cast. Domestic and international observers generally regarded the local and national legislative elections as legitimate and reflective of the people's will.

In 2006, Burundi's fragile attempts to develop democratic institutions received a boost as a key faction of the sole remaining rebel group, the FNL, agreed to lay down its arms and participate in the political process. The country was rocked by political instability, however, as several senior figures, including opposition leaders, were arrested in August in connection with an alleged coup plot. Critics claimed that the supposed plot was a fabrication, and the vice president resigned in September, in part to protest the arrests. In addition, the ruling CNDD party leadership showed increasing signs of intolerance toward opposition and independent viewpoints through, for example, the arrest of print and radio journalists.

In January 2007, former president Ndayizeye and four other accused conspirators were acquitted of the coup-plot charges, while two others were sentenced to jail terms ranging from 15 to 20 years. In June, the Palipehutu-FNL, the last armed group resisting the peace accords, reached an agreement with the government to implement a ceasefire, but disputes remained over issues including the integration of rebels into the military command and control structure, and violence continued. Meanwhile, a chairman for the long-delayed Truth and Reconciliation Commission was appointed in August. In September, political parties signed an agreement stipulating greater political freedoms and a strengthened fight against corruption, resolving a political crisis involving a boycott of the legislative process by FRODEBU and UPRONA that had threatened Burundi's democratic opening.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Burundi is an electoral democracy. In 2005, citizens were able to change their government democratically. Restrictions on political parties were lifted, and parties and civic organizations now function with greater freedom than previously. Burundi

currently has representative institutions at the local, municipal, and national levels, in both the legislative and executive branches of government.

While the lower house of Parliament—the 100-seat National Assembly—is directly elected for a five-year term, locally elected officials choose members of the Senate, also for five-year terms. Each of Burundi's 17 provinces chooses two senators—one Tutsi and one Hutu. Carefully crafted constitutional arrangements require the National Assembly to be 60 percent Hutu and 40 percent Tutsi, with three additional deputies from the Twa ethnic minority, who also are allocated three senators. In both houses, a minimum of 30 percent of the legislators must be women. Former presidents also hold Senate seats; apart from this provision, there are no rules to increase the size of either chamber by adding nonelected members.

Both houses of Parliament elect the president to a five-year term. The president appoints two vice presidents, one Tutsi and one Hutu, and they must be approved separately by a two-thirds majority in the lower and upper houses of Parliament. Governments must include all parties that have won at least 5 percent of the votes cast in parliamentary elections. CNDD members currently hold 13 out of 20 cabinet positions, and 7 of the cabinet ministers are women. The non-CNDD cabinet posts are held by UPRONA, FRODEBU, and two small Tutsi-oriented parties, the Party for National Recovery (PARENA) and the Movement for the Rehabilitation of Citizens (MRC). There are more than two dozen active political parties in the country, ranging from those that champion radical Tutsi positions to those that hold extremist Hutu positions. Most are small in terms of membership. Many Tutsis have now joined formerly Hutu-dominated parties.

Some government revenues and expenditures have not been regularly listed on the budget, which has contributed to corruption problems. In August 2007, the head of the Burundi Central Bank was arrested on charges of embezzling \$23 million. Burundi was ranked 131 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of speech is legally guaranteed and exists in practice, with some limitations. For example, the media have been subject to self-censorship and periodic government censorship. In recent years, the media have presented a wider range of political perspectives, and the opposition press does function, though sporadically. Radio is the main source of information for many Burundians. The government runs the sole television station and the only radio station with national reach, as well as the only newspaper that publishes regularly. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, Radio France Internationale, and the Voice of America are available on FM in the capital, Bujumbura. Several private radio stations exist, but they generally have a short broadcast range. Print runs of most newspapers are small, and readership is limited by low literacy levels. Access to the internet remains largely confined to urban areas.

Freedom of religion is generally observed. For many years the ongoing civil strife and the Tutsis' social and institutional dominance impeded academic freedom by limiting educational opportunities for Hutus, but there are indications that this may be changing under the current government. In 2007, President Pierre Nkurunziza stated that university campuses were being renovated and enlarged and that updating of course syllabi was under way.

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association, although past transitional governments occasionally restricted these rights in practice. There is modest but important civil society activity with a focus on the protection of human rights. Constitutional protections for organized labor are in place, and the right to strike is protected by the labor code. The Organization of Free Unions of Burundi has been independent since the rise of the multiparty system in 1992. Most union members are civil servants and have bargained collectively with the government.

The judicial system is seriously burdened by a lack of resources and training, and by corruption. Given Burundi's recent history, there are far more pending cases than can easily be handled by the current judiciary, and many of them are politically sensitive. The government has yet to establish a special tribunal called for by the United Nations. Many crimes go unreported. Conditions in prisons continue to be poor and at times life-threatening. Despite extensive negotiations and discussions regarding the establishment of some form of broad-based truth commission to address past human rights violations, no such body has yet been created. Amnesty International and other national and international human rights organizations have previously criticized the practices of the security services in Burundi and have reported that individuals opposed to the CNDD are particularly at risk of torture or worse. Numerous human rights groups have noted governmental impunity in wake of 31 extrajudicial killings in 2006 in Muyinga province.

As part of the peace agreement, the composition of the national security forces must have an equal ethnic balance. The process of integrating former guerrillas into the armed forces continued in 2007 despite continuing opposition by the Palipehutu-FNL faction.

With the improvement in the political environment, many of Burundi's internally displaced and refugee populations began returning home in 2006. According to the United Nations, over 7,000 returned in August 2007. Burundians continued to be subjected to arbitrary violence, whether by the government or guerrillas. Most of the abuses occurred in the provinces of Bujumbura Rural and Bubanza, the main areas of FNL activity.

An annual per capita gross domestic product of \$700 places Burundi among the poorest countries in the world. According to the World Bank, "poverty is widespread and has increased significantly since 1993, in both rural and urban areas. There has been a sharp deterioration in all social indicators which have become among the worst in Africa." According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, chronic malnutrition affects up to 40 percent of the population.

Women have limited opportunities for advancement in the economic and political spheres, especially in rural areas. As part of the 2005 constitution, 30 percent of Parliament members are to be women. Only 5 percent of eligible females are enrolled in secondary school. Widespread sexual violence against women continues to occur, according to Amnesty International.