Burundi

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0.1 The few weeks of violent confrontations between the two ethnic groups in Burundi has resulted in a further separation of the groups in Bujumbura. Although calm seems to have returned to Burundi, there are ever-increasing tensions between the displaced and the refugees in the northeastern areas of the country. Potentially explosive issues such as the re-integration or re-settlement of the internally displaced have yet to be fully addressed by the Central Government. A sense of fear and insecurity prevails. It is perpetuated by a culture of impunity, making efforts at reconciliation difficult. In this context, preparations continue for the National Debate, an effort strongly supported by Ambassador Ould Abdallah, the SRSG and the international community as a whole.

0.2 The massive displacement of populations and the relatively organized retreat of the Ex-Rwandan army and the Interahamwe from Rwanda to camps in Zaire and Tanzania have had an effect - perceived or real - on the balance of force within Burundi. In this regard, the perception within the Burundian army, predominantly Tutsi, is that Hutu extremists coming from refugee camps on the eastern and western side of Burundi borders are a significant threat. In large measure, this perception accounts for the variety of responses, on the part of the Burundi army and certain Tutsi groups, which include the eviction of the Hutu populations within Burundi.

0.3 The fact that the humanitarian needs which surfaced after the events in October 1993 in Burundi were, to a very significant extent, met by September/October 1994 seems to account for the general consensus within the relief community in Burundi that the humanitarian crisis is past. Even if an emergency does not now exist, there are reasons for concern about the future.

0.4 At present, there is an inadequate availability of food resources to meet regional needs. This has forced WFP to cease distributions among the displaced populations that are located predominantly in the northern provinces of Burundi, while continuing to serve refugees in those same areas. There is, therefore, the concern that an accelerated cutoff of food
deliveries to the displaced in camps (predominantly Tutsis) will pose security risks for humanitarian relief workers as well as for Government personnel who find themselves isolated and without support from Bujumbura. In this connection, it should also be pointed out that the internally displaced view continued assistance to nearby refugees (mainly Hutus) as an ethnic bias on the part of the international community. Groups of displaced persons in northern Burundi have apparently vowed to stop the delivery of assistance to the refugee camps. This may be the explanation for the recent attacking and looting of humanitarian convoys and supplies.

0.5 Another reason for concern about the future is the existence of weak administrative structure in the provinces. Health and educational services are continuously perturbed by ethnic turmoil and as a result, the international humanitarian community has had to set up parallel administrative structures. With dwindling humanitarian resources and resultant reduction in outside support, there is concern that a crisis will reemerge as Burundian social services will find themselves incapable of taking over from the humanitarian community, and government structures will be unable to address the possible instability.

0.6 In reviewing the current situation in Burundi, it should be understood that it is very different from that which existed in Rwanda in early April 1994. Burundi has since October 1993 been in a state of civil conflict with varying degrees of intensity. Populations have adapted to this situation and as a consequence have become extremely mobile, rapidly fleeing areas of insecurity. Prior to 6 April 1994, populations were intermixed in Rwanda and they had not experienced the type of large-scale violence which spread through Burundi after the assassination of the President.

0.7 Chances are that an intensification of the civil conflict in Burundi will in all probability lead to large-scale displacement of populations and not necessarily to the levels of killings witnessed in Rwanda from April to July 1994.

0.8 Consequently, present contingency strategies under the coordination of UNHCR are focusing on providing increased support and resources to the refugee camps of Zaire and Tanzania. The issue of coordinating the provision of assistance to the internally displaced remains inadequately addressed.

0.9 Finally, much thought is being given by members of the international community to the deployment of UN human rights monitors as a "neighbourhood watch-type presence", which assumes that foreign intervention can replace local indigenous action. Such reflections do not address the real challenge in Burundi and even in Rwanda, bringing to justice those who have committed crimes. The culture of impunity needs to be addressed; not simply identified.