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**REPORTERS SANS FRONTIERES**  
**BURUNDI 1995**

**Population:** 6.17 million

**Area:** 10,745 square miles

**Form of government:** Presidential, multiparty

**Per capita GDP:** 193 dollars

**Illiteracy:** 48%

**School attendance:** 29.1%

**Languages:** Kirundi, French (official), Swahili

**It was a year of continuing crisis in Burundi, with a war similar to the one that hit neighbouring Rwanda in the spring looking liable to erupt at any time. The media have done nothing to calm the tension; on the contrary, extremist journalists - the majority - have only made it worse.**

Major Pierre Buyoya, a Tutsi liberal who seized power in 1987, broke with the dictatorship of Jean-Baptiste Bagaza and steered Burundi towards democracy. He came up against resistance from Tutsi extremists (who were behind the massacre of tens of thousands of Hutus in 1988), but managed to introduce a multiparty system. In the general election of June 1993, the Hutu-majority Front for Democracy in Burundi (Frodebu) beat the Tutsi-dominated Party of Unity and National Progress (Uprona), which had been in power since independence in 1962. The rise of democracy thus coincided with the arrival in power of the Hutus, who make up 85% of the population.

It was against this background that the Burundi press was at its most powerful. As the June elections drew near, the government tolerated the emergence of a politically motivated but independent press. *Le Renouveau du Burundi*, the government daily launched in 1978, and the Roman Catholic newspaper *Ndongezi*, given permission to reappear in 1988, were joined on the newsstands by several new publications. Whether organs of political parties, such as Frodebu's *L'Aube de la Démocratie*, or independent titles like *La Semaine* and *Panafrika*, they all felt they were helping to establish pluralism in the media and strengthen democracy.

But the dream collapsed on 21 October 1993, when Burundi's first democratically elected president, Melchior Ndadaye, a Hutu, was killed by Tutsi militia. Admittedly the leaders of the coup had to hand over power two days later and a new president, also a Hutu, was democratically appointed. But the damage had been done. Between 21 and 25 October, tens of thousands of Burundians were massacred. In addition to Frodebu supporters taking revenge on Tutsis and on Hutu members of Uprona, the army cracked down pitilessly on its opponents. An inquiry later showed that some of the massacres had been planned by local Frodebu officials. Although order has been partly restored in Burundi, it has never really taken hold in people's minds, as the emergence of a powerful extremist press shows.

The phenomenon is not new. *Le Carrefour des idées*, launched in March 1992, has never made any secret of its hostility to the negotiations undertaken at the time between Frodebu and Uprona. This resolutely pro-Tutsi newspaper, run by the former mayor of Bujumbura, Juvénal Madirisha, aimed to warn Tutsis against the danger of "Hutu subversion". The results of the June 1993 election came as a shock to the newspaper and its readers. *Le Carrefour des idées* was back on sale after a two-month absence, more virulent than ever. The 15 December 1993 edition ran the headline "National hero or leader of the head-chopping tribe?" over the report of president Ndadaye's murder. On 22 December a decree issued by the minister of communication sought to ban "the publication, distribution, circulation and sale in Burundi" of *Le Carrefour des idées*, but the decree was withdrawn when it became clear that it was not possible to implement it. The episode showed that the political climate was undergoing a profound transformation.

For *Le Carrefour des idées* was not the only newspaper defending radical ideas. Extremist publications mushroomed, both on the Tutsi side (*La Balance*, *La Nation*, *Le Patriote*, *L'Etoile*, *Le Républicain*) and on the Hutu side (*L'Eclaireur*, *Le Miroir-Nankana*, *Le*

*Témoin*). Of the 22 newspapers appearing regularly in Burundi at the end of 1994, 15 were started after the October 1993 putsch and usually supported extreme solutions to the country's problems.

Not only the press was guilty in this respect. In response to *Radio Tanganyika*, Uprona's station, Hutu extremists who had taken refuge in southern Rwanda and the Bukavu region of Zaire launched *Radio Rutomorangingo* ("the station that cuts off limbs"). The station, which only broadcasts intermittently, is suspiciously similar to Rwanda's sinister *Radio Libre des Mille Collines*.

What exactly are these media saying? The 3 October edition of *L'Etoile* commented: "He (president Ntibantunganya) was already limping when he was enthroned, he will soon be finished." More explicitly, on 28 October *Le Carrefour des idées* offered a reward of a million Burundian francs to the person who brought in "the head of Léonard Nyangoma or Festus Ntanyungu [two Hutu leaders] on the end of a sword". In the 13 May edition, the paper asked: "Does the Hutu have a soul?" and went on to explain: "No Hutu ever upsets another; where brains are concerned, they are all Siamese twins. It's difficult talking to them, and those who have understood this have given up. The first pioneers to colonise Rwanda and Burundi realised that a Hutu is incapable of telling the truth. Don't take their threats lightly, you are not dealing with civilised people." Further on, the reader learned that "they [the Hutus] are going to cook you [the Tutsis] on skewers". The newspaper claimed that a Tutsi officer who disappeared in the Kamenge district of the capital on 19 March had simply been "eaten" by Hutu activists. "And it wasn't the first time. They also ate their victims in 1972", the article added. It also alleged that Frodebu members had shot dead a woman on 22 October 1993 and ripped out her heart. "They also shot her cow and then mixed the two sorts of meat to make kebabs." *Le Carrefour des idées* came to the conclusion that Tutsis were being threatened with cannibalism and that the Hutus had a plan for the mass extermination of Tutsis which they were "perfectly capable of putting into effect".

This aggressive and defamatory style, openly inciting racial hatred and murder, plays on age-old fears and resentment and helps to fuel the fires of unrest on both sides. At the end of March, when inter-ethnic skirmishes left more than 400 dead in the streets of Bujumbura, it was generally expected that fighting would erupt all over the country. Yet it was in Rwanda that the tragedy occurred.

The attack that killed presidents Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi and Juvénal Habyarimana of Rwanda on 6 April triggered the conflagration in the Rwandan capital of Kigali that soon spread across the whole country. The war and the cold-blooded genocide of Tutsis left between 500,000 and a million dead and ended in a military victory for the Tutsi-dominated Patriotic Rwandan Front based in Uganda. Major population movements between Rwanda and Burundi followed. Between April and June, refugees fleeing the war in Rwanda arrived in Burundi, while from July onwards tens of thousands of Rwandan-origin Tutsis living in

Bujumbura (sometimes for more than 30 years) started returning to Rwanda. The delicate political balance in Burundi became even harder to maintain.

At the end of the year, the atmosphere was one of permanent civil war. People hacked to death with machetes, grenades thrown at street markets and shots fired in broad daylight were all common occurrences, and no-one dared intervene to stop them. People preferred to stay in their own neighbourhoods. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced people, both Hutus and Tutsis, struggled to survive in makeshift camps. Both sides clung to their arguments, rumour and propaganda abounded and all semblance of civilised discussion seemed to have disappeared. The authority of the state was weakened by the constant struggles between the legal (Hutu-majority) government and the Tutsis, who have effective control of the country. State media such as the daily *Le Renouveau du Burundi* and *Radio-Télévision Nationale du Burundi (RNTB)* are similarly split, and it is difficult to see how open conflict can be avoided. "The solution lies in sharing", one radio official suggested. Meanwhile, the Hutu management of the broadcasting authority compensates for the Hutu staff minority by increasing censorship of the Tutsi majority...

In these circumstances, the Association of Burundian Journalists and the Association for the Promotion and Protection of Press Freedom feel totally isolated in their struggle to ensure a quality press in Burundi.

### **Murders and disappearances**

*RNTB* journalist Alexis Bandyatuyaga was murdered by the Burundian army on 14 or 15 September. During the night of 13 September soldiers went to the Kamenge neighbourhood, where civilians had been rebelling after Hutu militia distributed weapons. The army burned down hundreds of homes and arrested thousands of Hutus. "Suspects" were held at the Bujumbura Advanced Technical College. Under the supervision of the chief military prosecutor, the army then tried to find out who had been involved in the uprising over the previous few days. The prisoners were "sorted" and at least 13 people were killed, including the journalist.

Alexis Bandyatuyaga was one of the first victims, probably in the evening of 14 September or early the next day. Aged about 40, he had been working for the radio for more than ten years and had recently produced a series of reports on army atrocities committed in March and April, when civilians in northern parts of Bujumbura were disarmed.

### **Threats and harassment**

In October the head of the state printing works received threats from Tutsi extremists "advising" him to stop dealing with extremist Hutu newspapers such as *L'Eclaireur* and *Le Témoin*. He decided to simply stop printing all privately owned newspapers.

Alexis Singuhije and Jean-Marie Gasana, national radio journalists who also run the weekly *La Semaine*, were forced in November to go into temporary exile in Rwanda, and then

in Tanzania. They had been under pressure for several months, receiving threats from various extremist groups, especially within the army. In an article published in *Le Phare* on 6 January 1995, after their return to Burundi, the journalists announced that they were "putting down their pens" to avoid further threats.

### **Obstacles to the domestic free flow of information**

Between 12 and 14 September, during fighting between the army and the mainly Hutu inhabitants of the Kamenge and Kinama neighbourhoods of northern Bujumbura, the offices of two newspapers believed to be close to Hutu extremists, *Le Témoin* and *L'Eclaireur*, were destroyed by the army. Both newspapers temporarily ceased publication.

### **Interventions by Reporters Sans Frontières**

On 3 January Reporters Sans Frontières expressed concern about the drift towards extremism by some media and the temptation for the authorities to introduce censorship.

On 16 September RSF expressed concern about the ransacking of two newspaper offices, *Le Témoin* and *L'Eclaireur*, by the army and the disappearance of several journalists working for them.

On 20 September RSF was astonished to learn of the killing of *RNTB* journalist Alexis Bandyatuyaga and condemned the atrocities committed by the army during the fighting in Kamenge.

Draft resolution presented by the Group of Fifteen, Canada

The Commission on Human Rights,

Recalling the role of the media in spreading racial hatred and inciting crime that led to the genocide in Rwanda,

Taking account of the fact that the media in Burundi are also inciting racial hatred [extracts from the press],

Recalling the importance of the media in exacerbating fighting, as confirmed by the special report on the former Yugoslavia (E/CN.4/1995/54),

Underlining the important role of the special rapporteur on freedom of speech and opinion in denunciation,

Urgently calls on the special rapporteur on freedom of speech and opinion to carry out a mission to Burundi as soon as possible in order to study the role of the media in spreading racial hatred and to draw up a report for the High Commissioner for Human Rights, José Ayala Lasso, so that he may take the appropriate measures to silence these media.