



Government declines to grant 541 Burundians asylum

21 Jan 2006

By Guardian Reporter

The government has refused to grant refugee status to 541 Burundians for failing to prove that their lives would be in danger if they returned to their home country.

Speaking at a press conference in Dar es Salaam yesterday, Home Affairs Minister, John Chiligati, said that towards the end of last year, 714 asylum seekers from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo crossed into Tanzania and applied to granted refugee status.

‘The Burundians came from Kirundo Province and said they were fleeing drought and hunger, the minister said.

Chiligati said the asylum seekers entered Kigoma and are still living in various refugee camps in Kibondo district.

He said: ‘After these people entered the country, we formed a special committee to find out the reasons that made them flee their countries.

The findings show that most of them, especially those from Burundi, lacked plausible reasons to justify why they should be granted asylum, in keeping with the Geneva Convention on refugees that lays down the conditions one must fulfil before being granted refugee status.

He said that the Geneva Convention stipulates that for one to qualify to be a refugee, his or her life must be in danger as a result of insecurity, discrimination or perceived political persecution if he or she stayed in that country.

The minister revealed that 541 Burundians’ application for refugee status fell short of meeting these conditions, hence their disqualification.

He said that the government in collaboration with the United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is preparing to repatriate the 541 Burundians soon.

‘The Burundi government has been informed of this decision through its embassy and it (Burundi) confirmed that Kirundo Province, where these people came from has indeed been hit by drought and hunger, which forced them to seek asylum in Tanzania,’ he said.

The minister, however, said that Tanzania would continue to respect the international

laws protecting refugees in accordance with the Geneva Convention.

‘The Burundi government will be involved fully in their repatriation,’ he said.

He added that in the third week of next month the government would hold a tripartite meeting with Burundi and UNHCR to discuss strategies to repatriate the refugees.

The minister said repatriation of refugees to their respective countries was among the priorities of the government.

He pledged continued co-operation with UNHCR in the repatriation of 397,375 Burundian and 140,000 Congolese refugees who still live in the country until they all returned to their respective countries.

* SOURCE: *GUARDIAN*