

Burundi refugees in Tanzania to assess situation at home

AFP, March 29, 1992

DAR ES SALAAM, March 29 (AFP) - Burundi refugees in Tanzania have formed a committee that will assess the situation in their country before deciding whether to return home under a UN.-sponsored repatriation programme or seek Tanzanian citizenship.

Home Affairs Minister Augustine Mrema told journalists Sunday that the committee would visit Burundi early next month and that its report would help the 200,000 Burundian refugees in Tanzania decide whether they would go home or become naturalized Tanzanian citizens.

On Thursday Mrema said the refugees had three months in which to either return to Burundi or opt for Tanzanian citizenship.

He said the Tanzanian Government was convinced that the reasons that led to their flight from Burundi no longer existed.

He said Burundian President Ma-

gor Pierre Buyoya had embarked on a policy of reconciliation and democratisation which had created an atmosphere conducive to the refugees' return.

The 30-year history of independent Burundi has been marked by periodic bloodbaths between the Hutu majority and the smaller but more powerful Tutsi tribe.

In 1972 some 150,000 Hutus were killed in tribal bloodletting and 80,000 others fled to neighbouring countries.

Sporadic violence since then has led to increasing numbers of people fleeing into Tanzania, which is estimated to host a total of 300,000 refugees from neighbouring Mozambique, South Africa, Somalia, Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi.

Mrema said the government did not intend to harass the Burundian refugees but rather was making an effort to solve a problem which had be-

come a great burden on Tanzania's ailing economy.

He said those refugees who did not take either of the two options would retain their refugee status.

The voluntary repatriation package was signed in August last year

by the governments of Tanzanian and Burundi and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

Some 114 million dollars have been set aside for the programme.

hb/jnm/hn AFP AFP SEQN-0147