

Un Acts To Limit Burundi Flare-up Of Tribal Killings.

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The United Nations yesterday launched a diplomatic effort to stop fighting between members of the Hutu and Tutsi tribes from spreading throughout Burundi after 30 people were killed yesterday in the capital, Bujumbura.

Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, UN special envoy to Burundi, said that Bujumbura was being "held hostage by a minority of Tutsi (many of them former soldiers) who do not want to see a peaceful settlement reached between the government and the opposition".

Yesterday afternoon Mr Abdallah sent to Burundi in October to mediate between the two ethnic groups after six weeks of killing called an emergency meeting of political leaders to prevent a return to widespread ethnic strife.

"In any other country what is happening here would be called terrorism. The whole country is being blackmailed by a small group who fear prosecution for their role in the murder of the President," Mr Abdallah said.

Melchior Ndadaye, a Hutu, was elected President last June. He was murdered by Tutsi army officers in a failed coup in October. Hutu vigilantes immediately began murdering Tutsis, while the army and Tutsi militia responded in kind against Hutus.

The result was a death toll of between 100,000 and 150,000, and the flight of 300,000 refugees to Zaire, Tanzania and Rwanda.

The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that 30 people had been killed and another 40 wounded in clashes yesterday. Twenty were killed and 20 wounded on Sunday when two buses from the south of the country were attacked by mobs as they arrived in the capital. Bujumbura's streets were empty yesterday and businesses closed. Rival groups were fighting in Kamenge, Musaga and Jape districts. "Grenades and rifles are being used in the fighting. Grenades are a new development and most worrying," said Patrick Fuller, spokesman for the Red Cross.

Mr Abdallah said that barricades had been set up in the city: "If you drive up to a crossroads and don't turn away, they smash your car."

The Hutu-dominated parliament recently elected Cyprien Ntaryamira, the former Agriculture Minister, as President after a deal negotiated between the nine main political groups by the UN. But the Tutsi-controlled Supreme Court refused to ratify his appointment. The subsequent dismissal of the court last week touched off a

resurgence of ethnic violence among rival youths.

High death tolls from dysentery and measles in the refugee camps of Zaire, Rwanda and Tanzania have forced many Burundi to return to their homeland. But yesterday Shelly Pitterman, representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said he feared that a new wave of people would start fleeing the country again.

"This is very, very discouraging," he went on. "The fighting in Bujumbura will seriously disrupt our relief efforts. Starving people will have to wait for food in the camps, if they get it at all."

In Addis Ababa, Salim Salim, Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity, who visited Burundi last week, told a meeting of Foreign Ministers that the country remains "tense, fragile and potentially explosive". OAU efforts to reconcile military and civilian officials in the wake of the coup attempt have led to "many

misunderstandings, some real, some whipped up for political expediency".

Mr Salim reported that the latest round of ethnic fighting had decreased but not ended in Burundi. He said that plans by the OAU to send a 100-member military team to protect civilian leaders, including President Ntaryamira, have been delayed by opposition from some of the military and politicians. Opponents of the plan argued that the presence of foreign troops would violate the country's sovereignty.

Mr Salim said other African countries that were suffering or faced with internal strife were Somalia, Congo, Angola, Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan, Togo and Zaire. Thousands of people have been killed in these countries and millions more displaced or forced to flee their homelands in recent years due to fighting that was caused by ethnic-based political conflicts.

By Sam Kiley, Africa Correspondent.