

# Election of moderate Hutu as speaker defuses crisis

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BUJUMBURA, Jan 13 (AFP) - A moderate Hutu has been elected speaker of Burundi's national assembly, ending a crisis that threatened further bloodletting in the ethnically tense Central African nation.

Leonce Ngendakumana, the 38-year-old secretary general of the Hutu-dominated government party, known as FRODEBU, was elected late Thursday. He replaced Jean Minani, whom Tutsis accused of inciting massacres of Tutsis during a wave of ethnic violence that left an estimated 50,000 dead in the fall of 1993.

Minani's election had threatened to undo a power-sharing agreement between the majority Hutus and minority Tutsis, who control the army, that was designed to prevent duplication of the civil war that recently wracked neighboring Rwanda, which has the same ethnic mix.

Members of the cabinet from the opposition Tutsi party, known as UP-

RONA, had refused to participate in the work of the government after Minani's December 1 election as speaker.

They were to return to their offices Friday and begin discussing the budget on Monday.

But a cease-fire imposed on December 21 after Minani's election sparked ethnic fighting was not immediately lifted.

On December 29, Burundi President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya announced to the 12 parties involved in the power-sharing agreement that Minani would step down.

Eventually, Ntibantunganya gave up his post as president of his party to Minani, who on Thursday resigned as speaker of the assembly, clearing the way for Ngendakumana's election.

The Tutsi-led UPRONA, which has 16 seats and is the only opposition party represented in the parliament, had voted against Minani's election

as speaker on December. But on Thursday, the party voted for Ngen-dakumana, giving him 67 votes out of 69 members of parliament.

During the crisis, Minani had denied the accusations levelled by the Tutsi opposition.

The Tutsis had claimed that when a Tutsi-led coup attempt in October 1993 failed, though it led to the assassination of the first Hutu president,

Melchior Ndadaye. Minani, who was in Kigali, Rwanda, at the time, called for a bloody revenge on the Hutu's Radio Mille Collines, often accused of ethnic intolerance.

Minani insisted that he had simply called for resisting the coup plotters. "I am innocent" he told AFP, and even filed a lawsuit for libel against UPRONA.

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