

COMMUNIQUE OF THE GOVERNMENT FOLLOWING THE REFOULEMENT OF BURUNDIAN REFUGEES BY RWANDA

1. On Sunday, April 01, 2018, the Government of Burundi was informed about the return of 1,604 Burundian refugees expelled from Rwanda via the Nemba-Gasenyi border post in Kirundo Province, out of 2,500 people registered upon their arrival in Rwandan from the Democratic Republic of the Congo a few weeks ago. These returnees consisted mainly of women, children and the elderly.
2. According to the first declarations of these forced returnees, they were reportedly expelled from Rwanda because they refused to be recruited to join the armed groups in order to attack Burundi, while the youngest consisting of roughly a thousand of girls and boys, have been held for forced recruitment into criminal groups.
3. The following day, 02 April, following the pressure of the public opinion subsequent to the protests of the separated returnees of their families, two other groups this time composed of men and young people were expelled from Rwanda, but by other routes ; 514 by the Kanyaru border, and about 381 by the Ruhwa border to the north west. The Burundian authorities are busy checking identities to ensure that these people match those claimed by their families.
4. The official theory put forward by the Rwandan authorities that this group of refugees refused to register to justify their deportation is unfounded. It was only a pretext, since the physically fit men and the young men sorted out of the group they tried to hold back had not given up their beliefs.
5. As a reminder, more or less four years ago, the Government of Burundi observed the departure of the followers of Zebiya to the Democratic Republic of the Congo where they settled in Kamanyola. The strange behavior of these refugees as a result of their beliefs led to a deadly confrontation with Congolese police forces, which led some of them to seek asylum in Rwanda.

6. Apart from the fact that this same country, Rwanda is hosting some of the putschists of May 2015 and the terrorists who plunged Burundi into mourning following the violence that resulted from the 2015 insurgency, the forced recruitment of refugees including minor children in armed groups is a serious violation of international treaties and conventions that Rwanda itself has ratified, which prohibit the recruitment, military training and arming of refugees. The children captured during the Kabarore attack in July 2015 were shown to the diplomats and handed over to UNICEF after a period of social supervision.

7. And Rwanda is not limited to this single violation of international instruments. Indeed, the Rwandan authorities have also already violated the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region in its article 5, paragraph 1, as well as the Protocol on non-aggression and mutual defense of the same article 4, paragraph 4, as well as article 8 of the same Protocol in its subparagraphs which prohibit, inter alia, "any Member State to host on its territory armed or insurgent groups participating in armed conflicts or acts of violence or subversion against the Government of another State ... "

8. It is the same for the OAU Convention of 1969 Governing the Specific Problems of Refugees in Africa in its Art II, Section 6 stipulates that : "The States signatories undertake to prohibit refugees established on their respective territories to attack any member State of the OAU by any activity likely to cause tension between the Member States, and in particular by means of arms, the written press, ... "

9. The AU Niamey Convention on Cross-border Cooperation in its Art 2, 3 and 4 on Security is also not respected by Rwanda, thus endangering a fundamental text governing this Organization.

10. On several occasions, the Government of Burundi informed the highest international bodies, the EAC, the ICGLR, the Security Council and very recently the President of the African Union Commission on the eve of the summit of Kigali on the Continental Free Trade Area from March 17 to 21, 2018, to denounce the lack of progress in the settlement of the dispute between Burundi and its neighbor Rwanda, careless about the respect of its commitments vis-à-vis the International Community.

11. The Government of Burundi therefore strongly condemns this new campaign of destabilizing acts by Rwanda through taking unfair advantage of the vulnerable conditions of refugees by enrolling their young people into criminal activities. The Government asks the Rwandan authorities that in addition to those who have just been allowed to return, to release all the other Burundian refugees taken hostage with the complicity of certain UNHCR-Rwanda agents for unacceptable speculations.

12. The Government of Burundi commends the spirit of solidarity that characterized the refugees who refused to accept the shameful attempt of the Rwandan authorities to divide them in order to arm them against their own country. It encourages all those still in exile to return in their homeland where the Government and their compatriots are waiting for them with open arms and that their security and that of their property is fully guaranteed.

13. The Government of Burundi continues to place the United Nations and particularly the UNHCR before their responsibilities and once again asks them to follow closely the issue of Burundian refugees living in Rwanda and, above all, never again prevent those who are constantly asking the return to their country.

14. To the President of the Commission of the African Union, the Government requests to appeal to Rwanda whose Head of State Paul KAGAME assumes the chairmanship of the AU for this year 2018 to respect the elementary rules governing this August African Family, starting with the principle of good neighborliness.

15. Recalling that all these maneuvers are intended only to disrupt the process of the Constitutional Referendum in progress, the government reassures the people of Burundi that all the necessary measures to secure the voting have been taken, trouble makers being condemned to face the same failure like in previous attempts.

Done at Bujumbura, 04 April 2018

Philippe NZOBONARIBA

Secretary-General and Spokesman
of the Government.-

