



Timeline

- 1962:** Burundi wins independence from Belgium
- 1965:** Hutu soldiers attempt coup; mass repression of Hutu follows
- 1972:** Government responds to Hutu rebellion by killing tens of thousands of Hutu
- 1988:** Thousands of Hutu massacred
- 1993:** Ndadaye assassinated by the Tutsi-dominated army; massacre of Tutsi follows
- 1994:** Rwandan Genocide against Tutsi
- 1998:** Arusha talks begin, facilitated by Presidents Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania
- 2000:** Arusha Peace Agreement ends 12 years of civil war, creates transitional government
- 2005:** New constitution approved by 92% of population
- 2015:** Unrest sparked by President Nkurunziza's third term bid

Origins of Conflict

Since independence in 1962, Burundi has repeatedly been plagued by armed violence. The roots of the discord trace back to the Belgian colonial administration, which favored Tutsi over Hutu—the same ethnic prejudice that led to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. In 1972, the continued favoritism of Tutsi in post-colonial Burundi motivated some Hutu to attack Tutsi, declaring their intention to annihilate the population. The government responded to the violence by sponsoring mass killings of Hutu intellectuals.

After the first democratically-elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated in 1993, civil conflict escalated, and over 25,000 Tutsi were targeted in mass killings later categorized as genocide. Civil war continued until 2005 with the Arusha Peace Agreement, which ended the fighting, guaranteed political participation of Tutsi, and discouraged over-representation of specific ethnic and political groups in the government and military.

Current Conflict

In 2015, incumbent President Pierre Nkurunziza announced that he would run for a third term, an act that many citizens contend is a violation of the Arusha Agreement and the Burundi Constitution. In response, many Burundians took to the streets in protest. Since then, the government has used violence to quell the protests, which has only escalated since a failed coup attempt in May 2015.

In November 2015, Senate president Révérien Ndikuriyo called upon district authorities to “go to work,” a loaded phrase in the local language, used in the Rwandan genocide to mean “to kill.” Similar language has since been echoed by other members of the ruling party. It is estimated that over 1,000 people have been killed since the onset of the conflict, and over 6,000 have been taken as political prisoners, including over 500 youth arrested for doodling on photos of Nkurunziza. There have been 345 recorded torture cases, some by use of electrical shock and acid. Testimonies recount women forced to strip naked to see relatives in prison, and Human Rights Watch has reported gang-rape of women by youth militia members. Nearly 300,000 refugees have fled to neighboring countries, living in camps where many feel unsafe. Peace talks have been stalling and few are optimistic about their outcome. The ruling party refuses to speak with opposition groups it considers “terrorists” and will only speak with groups who already support Nkurunziza and his third term.