



## DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

September 24, 1972

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER  
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: The U.S. Response to the Burundi Tragedy

Between April 29 and the end of July, serious ethnic violence flared in Burundi. The United States during this period, both in Burundi and outside, made strong efforts to awaken African and international concern and to encourage relief to those affected.

What Actually Happened

Elements of the majority Hutu ethnic group plotted to overthrow the minority Tutsi regime. The Hutus struck in various localities on April 29, killing several thousand Tutsis. The Tutsi army with superior firepower quickly mastered the Hutu dissidents. A wave of reprisals followed, resulting in the deaths of more than 100,000 Hutus, and approximately 60,000 Hutu refugees in neighboring Rwanda, Zaire and Tanzania. (Burundi has a population of 3.6 million.)

Some of the killing was spontaneous with Tutsis attacking their Hutu neighbors. A great deal of the killing, however, was done by the government in a calculated manner designed to eliminate present and future Hutu leadership. The Tutsis clearly gave vent to their deepest fears of being eliminated as an ethnic group. Tutsis in Burundi have long been afraid of the kind of Hutu revolt which destroyed the Tutsis of Rwanda in 1959.

One of our major concerns was the safety of 150 U.S. missionaries who chose to stay with their parishoners, most of whom were Hutus. Despite the

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panic and the frenzy, the Tutsis were able to assure the safety of foreigners so as to minimize any basis for external involvement. In our approach to the crisis we were conscious of past Burundi suspicions against Americans. Two American Ambassadors have been asked to leave the country since independence. We were also conscious of Burundi's closeness to Zaire where we have major interests.

#### The Diplomatic Response

Through May and June, the U.S. together with other European nations and a few Africans sought means to stop the reprisals and allow relief agencies to operate without hindrance. A major obstacle to this was the attitude of the African states who, though obviously disturbed by these events, regarded them as an internal matter. They tended generally to support the position of President Micombero of Burundi who claimed the action was necessary in order to put down a Hutu revolt.

The first step was an appeal for national reconciliation by the Western ambassadors in Burundi. The American Ambassador joined that appeal.

The next step was to persuade African leaders to exert pressure on Burundi, because Africans normally like to solve their own problems without outside interference. In the absence of African initiatives, we made special appeals to the heads of state of Zaire, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Mauritania, the latter as President of the OAU. Mobutu of Zaire and Nyerere of Tanzania subsequently met with President Micombero of Burundi to urge an end to the killings on the basis of humanitarian concerns, the threat to Africa's image, and the need to hold support on southern African questions. For the duration of this effort, we coordinated closely with the Vatican in view of the Pope's forthright public statements and close personal interest in the problem.

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We also discussed the problem at length with the Belgians who are the largest aid donors in Burundi. They did as much as possible to exert political and economic pressures. At our urging, they decided to stop shipping arms and ammunition which they traditionally supplied to Burundi, a former Belgian colony.

In the belief that the introduction of relief activities by international agencies would dampen human rights violations, we stimulated the UN Secretariat to intervene directly. Secretary General Waldheim discussed the matter with the Burundi Foreign Minister at the OAU summit conference in Rabat in June. We spoke directly with Bradford Morse who played a leading role in organizing a UN mission to Burundi. Slowly and patiently, the UN established a permanent humanitarian presence and was eventually allowed free access to all areas. The decrease in communal violence beginning in mid-July tended to follow the slow spread of the UN presence.

#### The Humanitarian Response

The first week of combat generated heavy relief requirements. The Burundi Government requested international assistance, and received a great deal. The U.S. Government made \$100,000 available. Other governments, notably Belgium, West Germany, Peking and Zaire, made important contributions.

As it became clear that a massive repression of Hutus was in process, international humanitarian concerns were extended to them. At this point the Burundi Government balked, insisting that all relief supplies be distributed only in Tutsi-occupied areas. Relief requirements and human rights questions thereby became intertwined.

The violence also generated refugees in neighboring countries. Working with voluntary agencies, we made \$50,000 in resources available to this group. At our

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urging, the UN High Commission for Refugees, the host governments, and other Western countries assured a rapid and good supply of relief to the Hutu exiles, a process which is still going on.

The U.S. Role

In summation, the U.S. role was one of active quiet leadership of an international effort, handicapped by our history of difficulties with Burundi, African attitudes, and the reluctance of most European governments to get out in front.

Consultation

Our present Ambassador to Burundi is Robert Yost who replaced Thomas Melady (now in Uganda) in May. We will be arranging for him to return on consultation.

*R. Miller for*  
Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.  
Executive Secretary

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