

Controversial parliamentary speaker gets new post, defusing crisis

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BUJUMBURA, Jan 9 (AFP) - Parliamentary deputies in Burundi were Monday set to choose a replacement to their contested speaker, Jean Minani, following his election Sunday as leader of the Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU).

Minani's election to the parliamentary post on December 1 drew strong condemnation from the Tutsi-led opposition and sparked a political crisis in the country which has seen major ethnic violence since October 1993 when its first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated.

Minani, a former health minister, was voted in as FRODEBU chief by 177 votes out of 221 during an extraordinary party congress. He replaces Burundi's President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya as leader.

Clashes following Minani's election as parliamentary speaker left around 40 dead in the capital Bujumbura, and a curfew was imposed there

on December 21.

A planned rally by FRODEBU in support of Minani on December 18 was cancelled at the last minute for security reasons. On that day, around ten Tutsis were assassinated in Musaga south of the capital provoking a wave of violence in the central neighbourhood of Bwiza and the western Buyenzi district in which around 30 Hutus were killed.

The sole opposition party with parliamentary representation, the Tutsi-dominated Union for National Progress (UPRONA), had called for Minani's resignation as speaker. It accused him of urging massacres of Tutsis following Ndadaye's killing in a failed military coup attempt.

UPRONA announced December 24 it was pulling out of the power-sharing coalition in protest, but Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko decided not to resign.

Salvator Nzigamasabo, the plan-

ning, development and reconstruction minister, was suspended by UPRONA from its executive committee for attending two cabinet meetings.

Agriculture Minister Pascal-Firmin Ndimira was also criticised by UPRONA for attending a cabinet session.

In September, after complicated negotiations, FRODEBU and UPRONA reached an agreement on power-sharing which has so far prevented a tragedy of the dimensions experienced in neighbouring Rwanda following the deaths last April 6 of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyari-

mana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira in a suspicious plane crash.

Rwanda plunged into three months of carnage in which between 500,000 and a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed.

The two small central African nations have a similar ethnic make-up of Hutus in the majority and Tutsis in the minority.

Multiparty elections in Burundi in July 1993 gave FRODEBU 65 seats in parliament against 16 for UPRONA.

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