

Fighting in Bujumbura spreads

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BUJUMBURA, Dec 23 (AFP) - Fighting between Hutu and Tutsi militias in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi, spread Friday to the western neighbourhood of Buyenzi, with the youths throwing hand-grenades and firing automatic weapons.

Residents of the Tutsi-dominated Musaga neighbourhood said they could hear shooting in the adjoining southern district of Kanyosha.

The inhabitants of the capital nevertheless resumed normal activities Friday after clashes since Sunday which have left at least 30 dead and sparked fears of civil war.

Only a few shops remained closed, as was the central post office.

The government clamped a dusk-to-dawn curfew on Bujumbura Wednesday night after an emergency cabinet meeting, and with fears mounting that Burundi may plunge into civil war, the UN Security Council declared its support Thursday for the disarming of the militias.

Communications Minister and go-

vernment spokesman Germain Nkeshimana told AFP that fighting in the mixed neighbourhood of Bwiza had resulted in the deaths of at least 18 Burundians, with two of the wounded in a critical state.

Fighting round the central market on Tuesday – revenge attacks by Tutsis for massacres by Hutu militias on Sunday – left around 15 dead, the minister said.

Many residents of the capital remained at home both Wednesday and Thursday despite an appeal by the government for everyone to turn up at work on Thursday, and many shops many shops and offices remained closed for the two days.

Hutu residents fled Bwiza as the Hutu-dominated Front for Democracy in Burundi accused the army, made up mainly of Tutsis, of supporting Tutsi militias who have destroyed houses occupied by Hutus.

The front characterised the flight of Hutus from Bwiza as "ethnic cleansing."

Tension between the two communities is at flashpoint, raising fears that Burundi may plunge into a savage civil war like that which left between 500,000 and a million dead in its northern neighbour, Rwanda.

That war broke out after the Hutu presidents of both countries were killed when their plane was shot down over the Rwandan capital Kigali on April 6.

Witnesses said the violence round the central market on Tuesday started with a revenge attack by Tutsis who killed several Hutus suspected of the murder on Sunday of about 10 Tutsi inhabitants of Musaga.

The killers who went into Musaga decapitated one man and ripped his heart out.

They were suspected to be supporters of former interior minister Leonard Nyangoma, a Hutu fiercely opposed to power-sharing who is living in exile in Zaire, where he has created the National Council for the Defence of Democracy, a political party with its own military wing.

The fighting comes amid political instability created by an opposition demand for the resignation of the speaker of the national assembly, Jean Minani, a Hutu accused of inciting violence against the Tutsis.

Prime Minister Anatole Kanyen-

kiko's Tutsi-dominated Union for National Progress Party has threatened to leave the government – set up last October after complex political negotiations – if Minani remains in office.

The prime minister's party has accused Minani of having urged Hutus to kill Tutsis following the assassination by the military of Hutu President Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993 during an unsuccessful coup attempt.

Some 50,000 Burundians were killed in the violence that followed that assassination.

The Organisation of African Unity, preoccupied by the "insecurity, violence, murders and massacres," decided on December 14 to prolong the mandate of its 47-officer observer mission in Burundi.

In northern Burundi alone, some 20, 30 or 50 people are hacked to death with machetes, shot, or blown apart by grenades every week or so, and tensions are exacerbated there by the presence of more than 200,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees.

Pierre Buyoya, president of Burundi from 1987 until July 1993, warned on December 8 that the violence had reached a level where the country risked plunging into all-out civil war.

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