

Grenade attack on church leaves five dead, 30 injured

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BUJUMBURA, Jan 17 (AFP) - Unidentified assailants killed five people and injured 30 others in a grenade attack during a church service in the north of Burundi, national radio reported Tuesday.

The grenade was hurled into the Roman Catholic church during Mass on Sunday in the northern Kirundo province of the central African highland nation, on the border with Rwanda, the report said.

The radio did not say which ethnic group the victims of the attack belonged to. Both Burundi and Rwanda have been riven by mass violence between the Tutsi minority and the majority Hutus.

The coalition government in Burundi has accused former interior minister, Leonard Nyangoma, a hard-line Hutu who lives in exile in Zaire, and his armed supporters of waging a violent campaign to destabilise the country.

Scores of people have been killed in raids and arson attacks on villages and terror operations, including grenade attacks on the main market in the capital Bujumbura, in recent weeks.

Supporters of Nyangoma on Tuesday blamed the government for the violence and called for an international intervention force to protect "democratic institutions".

At a press conference in Nairobi, Nyangoma's aide Jerome Ndiho said that if a force of "at least 5,000 men" is not deployed, the armed wing of his movement will have "no other choice but to step up popular resistance".

His National Council for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD) and its armed Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD), charges that the coalition of Hutus and Tutsis "is maintaining bases for the civil war in the country", Ndiho said.

Nyangoma is a dissident from the

Hutu majority Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU) and opposes a power-sharing agreement signed in September last year between Hutu parties majority and the Tutsi opposition.

The pact was aimed at preventing the central African country from plunging into an ethnic bloodbath of

the kind that wracked neighbouring Rwanda last year.

Last October, the murder of Burundi's first elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, in a foiled military coup bid sparked off the massacre of tens of thousands of people, but the government survived.

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