

President calls for unity, end to "evils" of civil war

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LONDON, Feb 5 (AFP) - Burundian President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya called Sunday on his compatriots to strive for national unity and banish the spectre of ethnic carnage stalking the nation, Burundi radio reported.

In an address to the nation to mark the fourth anniversary of the adoption of a Burundian unity charter under former president Pierre Buyoya, Ntibantunganya called for an end to the "evils" of civil strife, the radio said in a dispatch monitored here by the BBC.

He said the country's unity had been "seriously undermined" and urged political opponents to resolve their divisions.

The address came amid growing social and political unrest in the central African highland nation, which has the same volatile ethnic mix of Tutsis and Hutus as neighbouring Rwanda, where hundreds of thousands died in tribal slaughter last

year.

Last week UPRONA, the country's main opposition party dominated by the minority Tutsis, called a two-day general strike which paralyzed the capital, in a bid to topple the government "at all costs".

The president added that over the last 16 months, civilians had been killing one another and destroying property "on the grounds of ethnic and political division".

In October 1993, a foiled coup by soldiers from the Tutsi-led army, in which the country's first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated, led to a wave of ethnic slaughter in which some 50,000 people were killed.

Ntibantunganya pledged to "live up to the principles of unity, so that the next anniversary (of the charter) may be celebrated in more harmony."

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