

Burundi acts to overcome tribalism

Burundi's President Pierre Buyoya, who came to power in 1987, has adopted a policy of encouraging tribal harmony between the majority Hutu tribe and the ruling, but numerically smaller Tutsi. Motivating his decision, no doubt, was a massacre in mid-1988 killing somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 Hutus. The U.S. State Department estimated that 47,000 Hutus fled to Rwanda to avoid the bloodbath. One year later, in August 1989, only 1,000 of these refugees remained in Rwanda. The State Department correctly attributed this "unprecedented" massive and rapid repatriation of refugees to "the Burundi government's serious attempts to effect national reconciliation."

This latest conflict was not an isolated case; similar "cyclical massacres" occurred in 1955, 1972, and 1979, producing a permanent refugee population of not less than 250,000. Like neighboring Rwanda, Burundi's population of 5.2 million is 80% Hutu. Unlike Rwanda, members of the Tutsi tribe until recently have dominated all areas of government and society.

Hutus, the vast majority of whom are Christians, are now being permitted to attend church—an act which had been discouraged before Buyoya—and encouraged to attend school. Only an estimated 20% of students are members of the Hutu tribe. The Army, which had participated in the massacres, is being opened to Hutus, as is the government.

Leaders of the Tutsi refugees living in Uganda are publicly identifying Burundi as a model for their reintegration into Rwandan society. However, the Rwandan leadership is distrustful, especially following the just-repulsed invasion of some 10,000 Tutsis from Ugandan territory. Rwandan President Habyarimana has chosen to solve the problem by requesting that Tutsi host countries Uganda,

Kenya, and Tanzania accept the refugees as citizens. Not surprisingly, they have refused.

The role of the Pope

Crucial to Burundi's commitment to national reconciliation has been the support provided by Pope John Paul II. On Sept. 6, during his most recent pilgrimage to Africa, the Pope addressed Burundi's civil service and representatives of the nation's university, financial, and social professions:

"You have clearly placed your Christian commitment within the framework of the changes that the people of Burundi are well on the way toward achieving for the consolidation of their unity. And you have spoken of a necessary examination of conscience. It is true that these questions are the consequence of a past of confrontation and suffering. You are not dodging them. In my opinion, they demand two important requirements from you. On the one hand, the nation's professionals must be the first to resolutely take the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. You remember Jesus' reply to Peter when he asked how often to forgive: 'I say to you, not seven times, but 77 times.' In other words, forgiveness knows no bounds (Matthew 18:22). It is not a question of forgetting everything, but of letting brotherly love overcome former misunderstandings or rivalry for the sake of building unity.

"The second obligation for Christians is to see that every human being enjoys the just respect of equal dignity. The jurists among you know well that for a state of rights, this is a basic principle which cannot be compromised. You should not seek artificially to deny the diversity of the members of a people, the diversity of groups and individuals, or the diversities of their gifts and capacities, but rather to adhere to a still more basic truth: Every human being is created by God, who in fidelity to his love, gave his Son for the salvation of everyone. This affirmation is at the very core of our faith; let us take care never to contradict our profession or our communion with the unique body of Christ."—*Michael Gelber*

cating in Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zaire, and Kenya; in the latter case to Tanzania, Rwanda, and Zaire. The accompanying box documents the possibility of resolving the crisis in this region by overcoming tribal conflicts through the efforts of regional leaders with the support of Pope John Paul II.

Liberia has become the latest nation deserted by the West. According to an off-the-record assessment by the U.S. Agency for International Development, America made a decision no later than early 1988 that Liberia, whose major

products are iron ore and rubber, was no longer of strategic interest. Simply put, from the standpoint of American pragmatism, we weren't getting out enough compared to the dollars and cents we put in. An October report in the *New York Times* documents people "dying from starvation and epidemic. People are boiling leaves and eating them just to survive. One palm kernel is sold for 25¢ or more in some places. Rice is now called 'gold dust' and many people cannot afford to buy even a cup." One-half the population, 1.2 million people, either have fled the war, or have been displaced.