

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

Kigali, ... 2.2.FEV...2016.....



Ref. No : 394/108.8 MOK/LSD

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
P.O.Box 160 KIGALI

MR Daniel BEKELE
Africa Director
Human Rights Watch
NEWYORK

Re: Response on Upcoming HRW Report on Burundi

Dear Mr Bekele;

This is in response to your communication via email on 18th February 2016 regarding an upcoming publication on the situation in Burundi.

In that regard, please find attached the Government of Rwanda's response to your inquiries and intended publication.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.




KALIHANGABO Isabelle
Permanent Secretary / Solicitor General

C.c:
-Rt.Honourable Prime Minister
-Minister of Foreign Affairs & Cooperation
KIGALI

GOVERNMENT OF RWANDA RESPONSE TO INQUIRIES FROM HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

The Government of Rwanda appreciates the information shared by Human Rights Watch regarding its forthcoming publication in the spirit of the Memorandum of Understanding between HRW and the Ministry of Justice.

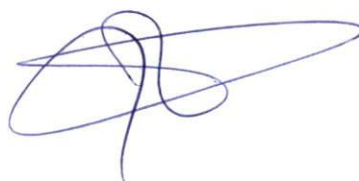
The Government of Rwanda fully acknowledges the responsibility to protect refugees on Rwandan territory including those from Burundi and does everything possible to ensure their protection and safety. As HRW is aware, Rwanda has continued to open its doors to Burundians in distress and provide a safe haven for them in partnership with the UNHCR and other partners.

The Government of Rwanda has heard of some broad allegations of insecurity among Burundian refugees from the media and through the recent information shared by HRW. In recognition of the responsibility to protect the refugees, Rwanda is intrigued by these accounts and seeks information that may be useful in carrying out investigations in the context of protection for the refugees but also the possible violation of Rwandan territory implied by the allegations.


According to the information provided by HRW; about 20 people were allegedly recruited from Mahama camp by Burundians and transported by road, using vehicles identified as public and military vehicles, outside of the camp to an undisclosed location. The report further alleges that the recruits were trained for a Burundian opposition force by Burundians and Rwandans after which they were escorted into the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In spite of Rwanda's commitment to investigate any allegations that compromise the safety of refugees in Rwanda or undermine the sovereignty of Rwandan territory, the nature of this account gives rise to several questions.

1. How was the identity of the interviewed subjects verified to exclude manipulation?
2. Does HRW have any form of identification for those individuals that could be matched with existing data bases of UNHCR and camp records to ascertain that they were indeed refugees in Rwanda?



3. Does HRW have any information regarding when those recruits left the refugee camp and whether this recruitment was a one off activity or whether it is a frequent activity?
4. HRW states that once recruited, the recruits were trained by Burundians and Rwandans. How was the nationality of those trainers verified? Apart from languages spoken throughout the region, is there any other fact that can positively identify them and conclusively establish their nationality?
5. Is HRW able to provide more specific information on when exactly these recruitments would have happened? It is mentioned only that it was between May and June 2015. Was it because the individuals interviewed did not remember when exactly?
6. Does HRW have any information regarding where the training took place? It is only mentioned that it is a few hours' drive out of the camp. Can HRW provide additional information that would make it possible to locate such a camp?
7. HRW mentioned that the recruits were transported outside of the camp using Rwandan military vehicles and public vehicles. How were these vehicles identified? Military vehicles have particular markings that clearly identify them and connect them to their origin. Does HRW have the number plates or other identifying details for the vehicles used? Can HRW provide precise details regarding date, time, route used and the destination of those vehicles?
8. HRW also states that some of the recruited individuals after receiving training were escorted to DRC. What became of the rest of the recruits who did not go to DRC? Did they return to the camp?
9. It is well documented that the Government of Rwanda has refuted similar allegations made in the media attributed to the UN Group of Experts. Is HRW basing their Report on interviews



of the same group whose allegations were previously refuted? Would HRW verify and ascertain that it is not relying on the same witnesses and sources of information?

These are only a few of the questions, answers to which would enable a credible account of these allegations to be established and for an investigation to be conducted into the issue.

In the interest of continuing to fulfill the obligation to protect the refugees in Rwanda, the Government of Rwanda remains very interested in following up this issue if indeed the account can be verified. Additionally this allegation has a possible bearing on the violation of Rwanda's sovereignty if indeed foreign nationals are coming into Rwanda, endangering the security of the Rwandan people and the people under the Protection of Rwanda.

In the absence of such necessary information to verify the claims made by HRW, it would be unwise to publish such a report as it would only be another example of sensationalism aimed at making news rather than protecting human rights. It would also serve to create a diversion from the conflict in Burundi by externalizing the problem and preventing the seeking of an internal solution to the Burundi situation. Instead, responses should be provided to the questions posed above as an essential first step towards providing a comprehensive response to the issues.

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