

# HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH/AFRICA

Formerly Africa Watch

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**The Honorable Jose Ayala Lasso**  
**United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**  
**United Nations**  
**New York**

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Your Excellency,

We applaud the creation of the office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We congratulate you on your appointment to this most important post and are confident that you will contribute significantly to improving the situation of human rights throughout the world.

Perhaps the most pressing human rights crisis in Africa lies in the adjacent countries of Burundi and Rwanda. In Burundi, the largely Tutsi military attempted a coup d'etat in October 1993 that robbed the majority Hutu of their first freely elected President and touched off violence that has cost tens of thousands of lives and driven nearly one million people from their homes. Although a new president was installed in January, the situation remains precarious, as was shown in the last week when new killings claimed hundreds of victims. In Rwanda a peace agreement between the Hutu-dominated government and the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front may collapse because of intransigence among the major players. In the meantime, political leaders have been assassinated and, in recent weeks, increasing numbers of civilians have been killed by private militia and commandos that operate with impunity. Human rights activists have been attacked and threatened with growing frequency. The political party of the Rwanda President has asked that an amnesty be a pre-condition for implementing the transitional government called for in the peace agreement.

The problems in the two countries are intertwined: Each country includes Hutu and Tutsi in roughly the same proportion and each shelters refugees from its



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neighbor. The borders between the two are permeable and both people and guns, now available in large numbers in the region, cross easily from one to the other. Hutu refugees from Burundi are doing military training in some camps in Rwanda, in violation of United Nations regulations. Recent cross-border skirmishes complicate the situation.

The United Nations is already playing a significant and highly constructive role in both countries. In Burundi, the Special Representative of the Secretary General, His Excellency Amedou Uld Abdallah, strives to keep a dialogue going between the opposing sides. In Rwanda, the UNAMIR peace-keeping force, under General Romeo Dallaire and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Dr. Roger Booh-Booh, are trying to facilitate the implementation of the peace agreement.

We ask that you make visiting Burundi and Rwanda a priority in these first weeks in office. Your presence would focus attention on the substantial human rights abuses already suffered by the people of both these countries and would underline the importance of providing guarantees for improvements in human rights as part of political settlements now under discussion. Such an initiative would also support the important diplomacy already undertaken by United Nations representatives and peace-keepers in this potentially explosive region.

We thank you for considering putting Rwanda and Burundi on your agenda as you begin your critically important work. We assure you that we are ready to offer whatever information or support would prove most helpful in carrying out your mission. Should you wish additional data or a briefing on this or other human rights issues in Africa, my staff and I would be happy to oblige.

Sincerely,

*Abdullahi An-Na'im*

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Executive Director