

Refugee conference to adopt action plan aimed at repatriation

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BUJUMBURA, Feb 17 (AFP) - An international conference on refugees in Central Africa was due to end here Friday with the adoption of an action plan aimed at the voluntary repatriation of refugees.

The conference sponsored by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations, which opened on Wednesday, has been held in a semi state of siege with the Burundi capital paralysed by a Tutsi-led general strike.

The opposition Tutsi-dominated Uprona party is calling for the removal of prime minister Anatole Kanyenkiko - himself an Uprona member - whom it accuses of siding with the ruling Front for Democracy in Burundi (Frodebu) party.

The action plan emphasises "voluntary repatriation as a way of achieving a durable solution to the problem of refugees in the Great Lakes region".

The document also notes the "impunity of those who initiated, prepared or carried out acts of genocide in Rwanda".

"Anyone strongly suspected of having committed crimes or serious offences before fleeing to a neighbouring country...should be excluded from international protection", the document says.

It hails the Rwandan authorities for setting up a broad-based government and parliament, a national army and civilian administration but calls for strengthening the administration and taking "appropriate measures against soldiers and civilians who take the law into their own hands".

The action plan also urges the Rwandans to respect the property rights of returnees.

On Burundi, the plan calls for "moderation to eliminate new pockets of tension" and appeals to the

government to give the army "enough means to combat armed formations".

It also urges the government and international community to speed up an enquiry into those responsible for the 1993 coup attempt in which the country's first Hutu president Melchior Ndadaye was killed, and over 50,000 people slaughtered.

The action plan appeals to host countries to restore order in the refugee camps and respect the rights of the individual. The Rwandan delegation at the conference, on several occasions, took issue with the presence of former Rwandan soldiers in Zairean refugee camps.

Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Commissioner, Ayala Lasso, said in Geneva the situation facing Burundi was "more dangerous than ever".

Addressing the UN Human Rights Commission, he said he had received "alarming" reports from the country.

"It is a matter of serious concern. I am afraid that another tragic explosion like Rwanda's might be in the offing unless we act now", he said. "It appears that we are coming increasingly close to the abyss".

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