



Displacement in Bujumbura Rurale Province, Burundi May 2008

In April 2008 serious violations of the 6 September 2006 ceasefire between the Burundian Army (FDN) and the rebel group Palipehutu-FNL (FNL) occurred. The most reported events took place in the capital city, Bujumbura, where three attacks took place on April 17, 18 and 22. Violence sprung in several provinces around the country (Bujumbura Rurale, Bubanza, Cibitoke and Kayanza), but Bujumbura Rurale province has been the most affected province, witnessing displacements of population.

The clashes between FDN and FNL have concentrated in the center and south communes of Bujumbura-Rurale. It seems that clashes developed first in the central communes east of Bujumbura capital city (Isale, Kanyosha), and moved then towards the south (Kabezi, Mutambu, Muhuta). The security situation is unstable and both sides keep reinforced positions in those communes. New FDN positions have been set up in those communes where the government military presence was scarce in previous months. Some of the FNL positions were removed, but the FNL is present in the area and it is reported that reinforcement came from the rainforest Kibira National Park where rebels usually hide. While some FNL elements are handing themselves to authorities, continuous FNL recruitment is reported to be on the rise successfully. United Nations have risen the security phase from 3 to 4 in Bujumbura-Rural and Bubanza provinces.

Internal Displaced People (IDPs) figures are not completely reliable and local and national stakeholders tend to diminish or to exaggerate numbers depending on particular interests. The population is fluctuant and figures vary from day to day and from place to place. Some of the communities were warned by authorities or combatants from either side and could escape the areas with some belongings, while others run away when they heard the first fire exchange without time to take any personal belongings. In general inhabitants do not want to leave their houses and prefer to regain their homes as soon as possible, because houses and crops risk of being looted or destroyed if they are left unattended. The major crop season starts in May. It has been reported in all communes affected that combatants from both sides feed themselves on the crops and on the meager possessions of the IDPs, and also that they have looted and destroyed property (arson, etc.). IDPs are often hosted by friends or relatives in villages close-by or in the capital Bujumbura. They are either dispersed or concentrated in temporary sites making it impossible to register accurate data.

Even if a high percentage of the Bujumbura-Rurale province has been affected, figures must be read cautiously as they change continuously. Many of the figures were calculated counting the inhabitants of hills that were completely emptied by the fighting, not by the number of people concentrated in the sites. People who returned are still living in fear and insecurity and they report they are ready to flee again as soon as the fighting starts

again. Concerns about security in some areas of displacement have been raised by a number of IDPs. At the peak of displacement it was reported that there were:

- 4,050 households displaced in Isale commune or 20,100 people out of 83,000 inhabitants concentrated mostly in 6 sites in the centre of the commune, Rushubi on May 2 (data Burundian Red Cross).
- 5,102 households displaced in Muyira and Kirombwe, both at Kanyosha commune on May 2 (data Burundian Red Cross).
- 4,305 households displaced in Kabezi centre in three different sites on May 7 (data Kabezi local administration).
- 3,166 households displaced in Gitaza centre and 1,100 in Rutongo, both at Muhuta commune (data Muhuta local administration).
- And fewer numbers of IDPs registered in Bugarama, Mutambu and Nyabiraba communes (several hundreds of households).

The fighting resulted in the death of several civilians; others were wounded by stray bullets. In Muyira two decapitated corpses of FDN soldiers and amputated dead bodies were reported by the local population on May 2. Family separation occurred but local networks worked rapidly to reunify families as soon as possible with the support of the ICRC and the Burundian Red Cross. No GBV cases reported during the fighting, but fear of sexual abuses was reported in all the communes.

Although there is no humanitarian crisis, the vulnerability of a number of households has been aggravated by the displacement. Often people fled their homes with no belongings (or few). A number of IDPs could not be sheltered in the displacement areas and sleep on the lands without protection. If the current tense situation lasts or if fighting resumes, the displaced households will not be able to harvest and the IDPs will add pressure on the already impoverished families residing in the areas of displacement, hence accentuating food insecurity. Therefore the situation needs to be monitored closely in the next weeks to prevent any humanitarian crisis (food, water and sanitation in the displacement sites, etc.).

Targeted basic assistance has been provided to the IDPs: 40 Tn of rice in Isale commune by the national authorities (Ministry of Solidarity), medical supplies by GVC to the local health structures, and non-food items and water/sanitation assistance through the local Red Cross/ICRC. Other organizations have been present to assess the situation or to provide help if needed, including the United Nations agencies. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has been monitoring the situation closely since the beginning of the violence. It has deployed two missions to assess the humanitarian and protection needs. Both missions were organized in coordination with the humanitarian community and conducted jointly with CRS and HRW. NRC also donated to the ICRC necessary non-food items to be distributed through the network of the local Red Cross to the most vulnerable and needy IDPs.