

[ABOUT REFUGEES](#)[GET INVOLVED](#)[ABOUT USCRI](#)[TAKE ACTION](#)[GET EMAIL UPDATES](#)[SIGN UP](#)

**Donate
now** ▶

About Refugees

[End Warehousing](#)[Resettlement](#)[World Refugee Survey](#)[USCRI Network](#)[Immigration](#)[Newsroom](#)[USCRI Headlines](#)[Local Stories](#)[TV and Radio Coverage](#)[Press Releases](#)[Publications & Archives](#)[GET EMAIL UPDATES](#)

SEARCH:

[GO](#)[About Refugees > Newsroom > Press Releases](#)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For Further Information

Contact: [Steven Forester](#)

Day time: (202) 347-3507

Evenings: (202) 215-3183

Again, Warehoused Refugees are Massacred in Africa

WASHINGTON DC, August 17, 2004— The UN Security Council has rightly condemned the August 13 massacre by Hutu extremists of as many as 180 Congolese refugees in Gatumba camp, just 2.4 miles inside Burundi. A UN statement noted that "most of the victims were women, children and babies who were shot dead and burned in their shelters."

The massacre is the latest in the region's history of refugee camp disasters, including infiltration by combatants, massacres, cross-border raids, forced recruitment, and the deaths of tens of thousands by disease and dehydration. It highlights yet again one of the dangers of refugee warehousing, the practice of confining refugees to camps or segregated settlements or otherwise depriving them of basic human rights.

As the U.S. Committee for Refugees noted on May 24 in releasing World Refugee Survey 2004-Warehousing Issue and launching our campaign to end the practice, "refugees are frequently warehoused in remote, desolate, and dangerous border areas in conditions of hopelessness and despair, subject to aggression, sexual exploitation, and risk of attack and murder by militias and armies."

Had the victims not been concentrated in Gatumba camp, they might be alive today. Indeed, when UNHCR tried to relocate survivors to a nearby school, at least 100 of them fled to Burundi's capital, Bujumbura. Apparently they did not want to pose another convenient target for extremist killers.

"Some ask, 'How will we protect refugees if they are not in camps?'" said Lavinia Limón, USCRI's executive director. "But these encamped refugees, unfortunately, were sitting ducks. Genuine protection means the enjoyment of basic rights, not managing populations in a confined space. The Gatumba massacre shows the bitter irony of thinking of camps as places of 'protection'."

Congo's civil war has claimed some 3 million lives since 1998. In recent months, some 20,000 ethnic Tutsi have fled to Burundi to escape fighting in the Congo between ethnic Hutus and the military. Since 1993, Burundi, too, has been wracked with lethal ethnic strife claiming hundreds of thousands.

The Burundi-based Hutu National Liberation Forces (FNL) claimed responsibility for Friday's massacre although authorities suspect that remnants of the Hutu militia responsible for the 1994 Rwanda genocide participated by crossing the border into Burundi from the Congo. Analysts suggest that the FNL, which has yet to agree to an ethnicity-based power-sharing arrangement for Burundi which was ratified just one week before the massacre, are engaging in a show of force. The FNL claimed that Gatumba camp was a "headquarters" of the Congolese Tutsi militia and that it had attacked them from the camp.

A system of refugee assistance which would grant refugees their rights would not require their concentration in camps, where they have so repeatedly proven vulnerable to attack by their enemies.

Gatumba was a "transit camp" in which refugees had been living since about May. Had they enjoyed their rights under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees to work and freedom of residence and travel, they could have registered on arrival and been

Past Press Releases

- 2005
- 2004
- 2003
- 2002

Refugee Conditions by Country

-- Choose One --



Search the Map



permitted to leave the camp and reside and work where they chose. The Convention even recognizes the right of refugees to travel documents enabling them to go elsewhere, if they felt unsafe in Burundi.

On Saturday, Burundian officials warned that guerillas are planning to attack other camps, and authorities have postponed a two-day regional summit on Burundi that was scheduled to begin on the 18th. When it occurs, we urge those convening -- including the seven invited African heads of state -- to call for an end to the warehousing of refugees in the region and for a recognition of their basic Convention rights.

The system of refugee warehousing and encampment will not end overnight, but denying refugees their basic human rights is itself a failure of protection.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) is a public information and advocacy program of Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA), a nongovernmental, non-profit organization. Since 1958, USCR has defended the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons worldwide.

© 2010 USCRI | [contact](#) | [support](#) | [privacy](#) | [feedback](#) | [jobs](#) | [store](#) | [login](#) | [network login](#)