
Interview: Leonard Nyangoma

The road toward peace in Burundi

Mr. Nyangoma is chairman of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy of Burundi. He was interviewed on April 1 by Linda de Hoyos.

EIR: What are the goals of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD)? And what are the military goals of the Forces for the Defense of Democracy in Burundi?

Nyangoma: Our political goals are to restore democratic rule in Burundi. As you well know, before going into the bush I belonged to an elected government, as a Member of Parliament and Cabinet Minister, in 1993. Our government was then overthrown by the army, led by Maj. Pierre Buyoya, who is the present military dictator.

Our military goals are of two natures:

Firstly, we want to prove to the putschist army that it can no longer rely on arms to ascend to power. Army officers and soldiers must abide by the law and respect the will of the people by supporting any elected constitutional—that is, legitimate—government. The present government is illegal and illegitimate.

Secondly, we want to force the formation of a truly national army, which will replace the present mono-ethnic and tribalist Tutsi army.

EIR: Why and when was the CNDD organized?

Nyangoma: When our legitimate government was overthrown, on Oct. 21, 1993, and when, subsequently, the democratically elected President Melchior Ndadaye was assassinated, the people who had just voted us in begged us to lead them and to challenge the army from ruling the country. We decided to create the CNDD in September 1994, when all other means of peaceful solutions to the crisis imposed upon us by the army had been blocked by the same fascist army.

EIR: Can you give some background on the government of President Ndadaye?

Nyangoma: The government of President Ndadaye, to which I belonged, was made up of members of the ruling party, Frodebu, at 60%, and 40% was from the coalition party, Uprona. What is to be known here, is that we, the leaders of Frodebu around President Ndadaye, decided to associate, into the government, our opposition party, Uprona, although we did not have to. They responded with ingratitude, by staging

a coup d'état and by assassinating our beloved President, together with some of our colleagues.

EIR: Can you give us background on how the elections of 1993 were achieved and carried out and won?

Nyangoma: After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Franco-African summit of La Baule, international pressures were mounted against military dictators, including President Buyoya. Although he did it half-heartedly, Major Buyoya accepted nonetheless to open up the political system to multi-party democracy, and he then agreed to hold free and fair elections, deeply convinced that he would win them.

It is at that juncture that Melchior Ndadaye, Pontien Karibwami, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, Richard Ndikumwami, and myself, decided to come out in the open with our clandestine political party, Frodebu, which we had created years earlier. We masterfully organized our campaign, and our program was espoused by the majority of the Burundians in the Presidential and parliamentary elections. Our candidate, Melchior Ndadaye, won, and became the new President. Out of 81 parliamentarians who made up the new National Assembly, 65 were from our party, Frodebu, while 16 were from the former ruling party, Uprona, which became the official opposition. I was proud that my contribution to our victory was major, because in the leadership of Frodebu, I was the National Secretary for Recruitment and Propaganda.

Let me emphasize that, if President Buyoya had known that he would lose the elections, he certainly would not have held them, or he would have won by rigging the polls. However, we won against all odds, and we appointed the government and the administration and the civil service. Major Buyoya and his friends, the losers, made a pretense of accepting the results, while preparing secretly to take over state power again by force. Three months later, on Oct. 21, 1993, a coup d'état took place, and this is what we considered unacceptable and we decided to counter it by all available means.

EIR: How would a government be shaped in Burundi now? How does the CNDD envision that?

Nyangoma: Whatever the transitional arrangements that can be negotiated, as in South Africa five years ago, the government of Burundi must definitely be an elected government, truly representing the people and caring for them. Any government to be appointed by people who have no such mandate will be unacceptable to the CNDD.

EIR: What does the CNDD propose for the reorganization of the Burundi military?

Nyangoma: Independently of the crimes committed by the present army—and which must be dealt with—it is simply unthinkable to have an army made up of members of one ethnic group, and above all, a minority almost exclusively from one single province out of 16 provinces, as is the case

now. The system that created such an army was ruled by irresponsible politicians and thugs. We in the CNDD, therefore, think that a new army must be created, one which will be representative of the people from all ethnic groups, and one that should be made up of soldiers originating from every corner and commune of Burundi.

EIR: What security guarantees does the CNDD require in Burundi on behalf of itself and also of Hutus?

Nyangoma: Guarantees to life, guarantees to fundamental liberties and all human rights, guarantees to be ruled by the leaders of an elected government, guarantees to participate freely in the public affairs of our country; most importantly, guarantees to a Constitution of Burundi and sure mechanisms to uphold and implement it.

Finally, as a practical measure, we will make sure that a law-abiding national army is set up, an army respectful of the institutions and trusted by every citizen. All these guarantees mentioned above must be given to all citizens of Burundi, irrespective of their ethnic group or region of origin.

EIR: What security guarantees does the CNDD believe are required by the Tutsi community?

Nyangoma: Since the tragedy in Rwanda in 1994, there is a propaganda operation going on, and amplified by interested lobby groups in America and Europe, that the Tutsi minority group of Burundi needs some special security guarantees. There is also a very dangerous trend to equate “Hutu” with “killer,” and any crime committed by the Tutsi is tolerated and justified by their quest for security. We find such reasoning very cynical indeed. The goal and trick of this propaganda is to make sure that the Tutsi hang onto power forever, by invoking their security.

The truth is that in Burundi, it is not the Tutsi who need security guarantees, although they are also entitled to it, of course. But first and foremost, the Hutu ethnic group, whose members, numbering more than 600,000, have been killed by the Tutsi mono-ethnic army since independence in 1962, are the ones who actually need security guarantees. The Tutsi have lost about 15,000 of their people in the same period during inter-ethnic massacres or civil wars in Burundi. If we put all the propaganda aside, who is actually exterminating whom?

For the CNDD, no single Burundian should die, and everything must be done to avoid civil war. But if one is provoked, what else can we do?

EIR: What route does the CNDD believe must be followed to achieve peace in Burundi?

Nyangoma: Our first option for the road to be followed to achieve peace in Burundi is through negotiations. But again here, the other side must show its willingness and seriousness this time around, because the people of Burundi have already been cheated several times by the oligarchy. If while negotiat-

ing in Arusha, we discover that Major Buyoya and his army are playing tricks and using the negotiations held under the facilitation of [former Tanzanian President] Mwalimu Nyerere as a way of consolidating their ill-acquired and illegitimate state power, then you can be assured that the liberation war will continue, until we remove this ugly dictatorship from our country.

EIR: How does the CNDD think that peace can be achieved in the Great Lakes region?

Nyangoma: Concerning the Great Lakes region, there can be no peace when some countries find it fit to grab others’ land and minerals under the pretense of protecting their borders’ security. Only a fool can believe that a border on Lake Kivu can only be protected by sending occupation troops to Kisan-gani and Kitona, towns situated 1,000 and 2,000 kilometers away, respectively, from the said border to be protected.

What is really at stake, is the will to occupy and exploit by force other people’s vast fertile land, and to loot their God-given huge deposits of minerals. That is the real truth and everybody knows about it. We are simply amazed when we are told the opposite by the concerned regimes, aided by the trigger-happy Western media, as if Africans were fools.

EIR: Does the CNDD have anything specific to tell the American people?

Nyangoma: What we would like to tell the American people, is for them to preach and practice modesty and wisdom. Being the strongest does not always mean to alone possess the right, as far as international relations are concerned. In African affairs, we please ask the American people to support *right*, *not might*.

We are convinced that the best way of defending one’s interests is to respect other people’s as well. Concerning the relations between the CNDD and America, we are satisfied with our good and sincere relations with Hon. Howard Wolpe, the U.S. Special Envoy to the Great Lakes region, although we do not always agree on everything. But we are sincerely afraid that some so-called specialists, including U.S. officials and private lobbyists, give inaccurate information about the situation in the Great Lakes region in general and in Burundi in particular.

EIR: What type of positive role could the United States play in the region to bring about peace?

Nyangoma: We continue to believe that the United States can play a positive role in bringing about peace in Africa, but only if it gives support to the elected leaders, instead of throwing its weight behind self-appointed dictators like Marshal Mobutu yesterday, Maj. Pierre Buyoya and the so-called new breed of leaders today. Only elected leaders who represent the aspirations of their people should be supported, instead of being victimized and demonized. The African people will remember.