



THURSDAY PRESS CONFERENCE 08/05/2021

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear journalists,

1. Welcome to this press conference where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission wishes to speak to you, with an open heart, on the current situation of inquiries and investigations into human rights violations and the mass graves of the 1972 crisis in Bujumbura mayorship and its surroundings. As a reminder, we have already carried out the same operations in the provinces of Gitega, Karusi, Makamba, Rumonge, Bururi, and quite recently in Kirundo and Muyinga.
2. The methodology of the TRC is simple and clear: to find out the truth about this crisis of 1972, we make contacts and hearings with representatives of the institutions. We hold information and awareness meetings with the same representatives in order to ask them for guidance and support. We run a media campaign; we visit the available archives; we identify sites for auditions. We do actual investigations; we identify the suspected perpetrators and the rescuers. We identify, confirm and exhume mass graves. We visit the memory places; we hear witnesses, victims and other resource persons... who agree to testify.
3. In the case of the city of Bujumbura, on July 22, 2021 we held an information meeting with the administrative authorities. They reassured us of their support and they are doing it correctly. Since July 27, 2021, we have started to deploy in the 13 zones of

the three urban communes of Bujumbura. The official launch of activities took place in Ngagara zone, at a place commonly known as "Zion Temple".

4. Since then, we have already interviewed more than 50 people with an age varying between 60 and 85 years, men and women, widows and orphans, former civil servants, former drivers, former students, who told us how they experienced the 1972 crisis in Bujumbura.

Dear journalists,

5. To sum up, the comments made by some witnesses interviewed are frightening. These witnesses have already revealed to the TRC that:
 - The institutions, the Army, the Administration, the Surety, the UPRONA party, the JRR... were directly involved in the arrests and killings;
 - The killings targeted part of the population, the Bahutu having studied or having a comfortable standard of living;
 - Mass graves were dug in Buterere by bulldozers from the Ministry of Public Works with the participation of mostly Zairian drivers;
 - Systematic looting was carried out in the government houses from which widows and orphans were expelled;
 - The result was a life of hardship, a hard life for widows and orphans;
 - There have been cases of Batutsi who tried to intervene in favor of the innocent and who were killed by their fellow Batutsi;
 - A rare case of a family from Buhonga who was able to organize mourning, while in the rest of the country it was forbidden;
 - Pupils who passed entrance exams to secondary school, did not find a place to continue their studies;
 - Many parents were discouraged by the arrests of officials and intellectuals, and prevented their children from continuing their education;
 - The soldiers said they were looking for Mayi mulele insurgents who had come to help the Bahutu to wage war in Burundi;

- A curfew and roadblocks favored the arrests of victims who allegedly tried to flee;
- Many innocent citizens were arrested on the basis of pre-established lists;
- In Buyenzi, several Bahutu had to change their nationality saying they were Zairians in order to escape the roundups;
- President Michel Micombero has requested military reinforcement from his Zaire counterpart, Mobutu. When the Zairian soldiers arrived, they found that there were no parties to the conflict, but massacres organized on an ethnic basis;
- The victims were arrested, taken to military camps where they were killed with bayonets, sticks, steel bars or shot;
- Families who tried to bring them food at the police station were not allowed to see them;
- Young people in military training (non-commissioned officers) were murdered;
- Sharp bamboo trees brought by so-called "Pfa kwurira" trucks were used to finish off the victims;
- Arrests were made either at home, in the service, or at roadblocks;
- Victims were loaded into vehicles, tortured by soldiers seated on them;
- The arrests mainly targeted able-bodied adult men, although a few women were also killed;
- It was forbidden to move from one commune to another without being provided with a "laissez-passer" duly signed by the provincial authority;
- Some Batutsi were also assassinated by their colleagues, victims of settling of scores;
- The Burundian State, the President of the Republic first, is responsible for the massacres of the populations;
- In Bujumbura, mass graves were often dug during the day to receive corpses at night;
- JRR activists were very active in tracking down the Bahutu, to whom they subjected them to torture with knives;

- During the arrests at the barriers, the victims to be shot were stripped naked and publicly humiliated by saying that they were looking for scarifications (indasago) on their bodies;
- The victims were beaten with hammers on the head. The others were stabbed with knives. There are victims whose executioners tied their hands tightly behind their backs until death followed after two or three days;
- The JRR activists mentioned by the witnesses interviewed by the TRC in recent days in Bujumbura were acting under the supervision of the administrative authorities;
- The victims were accused of being traitors, Bamenja, or of having bought machetes to kill Batutsi;
- The victims were also targeted by their facial features (flat noses);
- Widows and orphans were discriminated against in the environment and in schools;
- Mourning were prohibited;
- The victims taken to the military camps were killed between 7 p.m. and midnight by soldiers;
- Some victims were buried alive in mass graves in Buterere;
- Among many testimonies already received by the TRC, let us finally cite the case of a woman who was released from the dungeon after having given a ransom equivalent to 80,000 francs...

Dear journalists,

6. In Bujumbura mayorship, it is not just the widows and orphans who have spoken. Even the archives are talking ... The archives provide information on the names of those arrested in May 1972; on seized vehicles and homes; on seized bank accounts; on persons condemned to death by the Council of War of May 1972; on the political speeches of the time, etc ... In our investigations at the Ministry of Justice, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Education, the Burundian Press Publications, the RTNB (Burundi National Radio and Television)... we find that since the establishment

of the Republic, there have always been, and especially on the eve of the disaster of May and June 1972, difficult times when innocent citizens were accused of:

- Distributions of writings exciting the populations against the established powers;
- Monarchist reactionaries, therefore anti-Republican, planning or advocating a return to the monarchy;
- Spread of leaflets and rumors against President Michel Micombero and the country's authorities;
- Holding of subversive meetings....

7. At the Ministry of National Education, officials and teachers killed have been dismissed on charges of prosecution, resignation, or desertion after having been killed. We even found a layoff letter slipped into the personnel file of a killed official.
8. At the National School of Administration "Ecole Nationale d'administration", around fifty pupils have disappeared from this school, which numbered around 150.
9. At the Royal Athenaeum of Bujumbura "Athenée Royale de Bujumbura", TRC documented cases of arrests of Bahutu pupils injured by their classmates on the eve of Ascension Day in 1972.
10. At the Holy Spirit College "Lycée du Saint Esprit" managed by the Jesuit Fathers, there were not many arrests, but Batutsi pupils among the oldest, holding knives and stones, were divided alongside the Bahutu classmates to whom they inflicted excruciating blows. A courageous European priest stepped in to ease the tension.

11. At "ETS Kamenge", an army officer took pupils to an unknown destination on May 17, 1972. The officer, a megaphone in his hand said: "**There are pupils who must be arrested. I just want to make a call. Whoever hears his name will raise his hands in the air, walk towards the trucks, get on board, and lie face down**". All the pupils arrested that day died. In addition, the Burundian State has never told parents where their children have gone...

This is the part of the truth that must be told to the families of the victims; that we must remind the families of the alleged perpetrators and that we must tell in Burundi and the world.

Ladies and gentlemen journalists,

12. We could multiply the examples, because this also happened at the Official University of Burundi. However, let us talk about exhumations, since all these victims were thrown into mass graves. The date of July 28/2021 should be considered as the date of the effective start of the actual exhumations of the victims of human rights violations committed in 1972 in the city of Bujumbura. The activity took place mainly in ward 1 in Buterere, Cell 4 at a place called "Ku bumwe". Thus, three mass graves were verified and another was confirmed under a banana tree.

13. Witnesses told the TRC that soldiers in trucks brought the victims to this location. These victims, mostly intellectuals, came from different provinces of the country but mainly from Bubanza and Bujumbura provinces. These mass graves are found in sandy soil mixed with gravel in a swampy area. Gravel was used to backfill the marsh. Other bones are still visible near the residential houses. They were thrown there during the construction of the houses, according to the same witnesses.

14. On July 30, 2021, another mass grave dating from 1972 was verified and confirmed in Ntahangwa commune, Buterere zone, Buterere 1 locality, at the same place called "ku bumwe" in a land property belonging to a citizen. It is in a field of amaranths, 17 m from the first mass grave unearthed. This mass grave in the Buterere 1 neighborhood, "Ku bumwe" cell, some human remains were exhumed. Bones, clothes and belts were exhumed in the confirmed mass grave. The mass grave measures 6.3 m in length, 3.6 m in width and 1.10 m in depth. The exhumation of that mass grave has already been completed.
15. The day before, I mean July 29, 2021; two mass graves had been verified but not confirmed at this place called "Ku bumwe" in Buterere, Ngagara zone and Ntahangwa commune. They are located not far from the mass grave, which had been confirmed at the same place on July 27, 2021. Some human bones were exhumed.
16. In August 31, 2021, exhumations continued in Ntahangwa commune, Buterere 1 quarter, in the cell known as "Ku bumwe" (or Gbadolite). The observation is that the mass grave extends over an entire plot. Let us say that searches and exhumations continue in other places.
17. We have been informed that in the Parish of Saint Augustine in Buyenzi zone, there would also be a large mass grave. A retired driver revealed this information to us.
18. Bulldozers dug mass graves in Buyenzi and Buterere during the day to accommodate the bodies of the victims. The same machines made another rotation from midnight to dawn to deposit soil on the bodies of victims thrown dead or alive in mass graves. The assembly and killing points were the base camp of Musaga, Buyenzi and Ngagara military camps.
19. While the administration organized the preparation of mass graves, several Congolese drivers were used. According to witnesses interviewed by the TRC, they were all killed

at the end of this mission. Among them, some were machine operators who dug mass graves and deposited a mass of earth on the bodies of the victims; others were responsible for collecting looted cars from Bahutu victims in the neighborhoods. All these cars were collected in the base camp of Musaga.

20. This is where the TRC stands today, dear fellow journalists. We take advantage of this press conference to thank the people who have already testified and invite others to shed light on the truth of our country's painful past.

Thank you for your kind attention!