

Lamec Barishinga  
(SOURCE: Twitter, posted  
October 30, 2019,  
@BayiremeJackso2)



Joseph Ndikubwayo  
(SOURCE:  
YouTube, posted  
March 23, 2017,  
Baba G M)

# A CHURCH CAPTURED

## *The Battle for Control of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burundi*

BY GODFREY SANG

**O**n October 24, 2019, the president of the Burundi Union Mission (BUM), Lamec Barishinga, was arrested just as he tried to leave Bujumbura, Burundi for Nairobi, Kenya to attend the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) year-end meeting. The arrest sent shockwaves across Adventist circles around the world. This was the culmination of a series of conflicts between the ECD,

BUM, and the General Conference (GC) over the presidency of BUM. Joseph Ndikubwayo, who was named president of BUM in 2015, maintains that the East-Central Africa Division unfairly replaced him with Barishinga in 2019, and the General Conference ratified that ECD decision. Ndikubwayo continues to function as president of BUM with the support of the government, while Barishinga sits in jail.

The crisis in the Adventist church in Burundi is like no other in the world. Multiple layers of socio-historical and ethno-political issues, including complications of regional tensions and cross-border rivalries, sensitivities over focus by the international community, and an impending general election have all conspired, one way or another, to create a crisis unlike any other in Adventist history. Caught in the middle of it are ordinary Adventists who are now unable to attend church in the manner they did before or even freely associate with one another due to divergent opinions and loyalties. Institutional leaders are under government custody and police have repeatedly been called to intervene in often violent skirmishes that have involved loss of property. Images of police beating up members inside churches went viral and the General Conference president, Ted N. C. Wilson, called for prayers for the church in Burundi. At the heart of the crisis are issues of institutional legitimacy, the management of transitions, and the place of government in religious affairs.

### Historical and Contextual Background

Burundi is a landlocked nation in Eastern Africa, bounded on the north by Rwanda, on the east and south by Tanzania, and on the west by Lake Tanganyika and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the early fourteenth century, the Hutu began occupying the present highlands of the country following the eastward Bantu migration from the Congo Basin. They are said to have imposed their language and customs on the Twa people, the area's original inhabitants. A century later, the Tutsi arrived from the north and developed an organized kingdom, establishing themselves as feudal rulers. The Tutsi kings, or *mwamis*, became the monarchs of distinct kingdoms in Burundi and Rwanda.

The area that is now Burundi was colonized in the

late nineteenth century by Germany, jointly with what is today Rwanda, under the name Rwanda-Urundi.<sup>1</sup> The Belgians took over when Germany lost its colonies during WWI and administered it under military occupation from 1916 to 1922. Thereafter, Belgium obtained a League of Nations mandate to rule over the territory which lasted until April 1946, when the region became a United Nations Trust Territory under Belgium. When the United Nations granted independence to the territory in 1962, the area was divided into two countries: the Republic of Rwanda and the Kingdom of Burundi.

Burundi is one of Africa's smallest countries with an area of 10,747 sq. mi. (27,834 sq. km.), but it has one of the highest population densities on the continent. Most Burundians live in family groupings dispersed throughout the highlands, and villages are uncommon. The official languages are Kirundi (which differs slightly from the Kinyarwanda spoken in Rwanda) and French. Kiswahili is also widely spoken along Lake Tanganyika.<sup>2</sup>

The chief ethnic groups in Burundi are the Hutu and the Tutsi, who traditionally comprised 85% and 14% of the population respectively, with the Twa making up the difference.

As in Rwanda, the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic rivalry has been the dominant feature of Burundian society for a long time. This has almost always defined the national socio-political discourse and the church is usually never left too far behind in the complications of the ethnic matrix of society. Unlike in Rwanda, marriages between Hutu and Tutsi were common in Burundi but that did not quite remove ethnic tensions, partly because society is strongly patrilineal, making identity quite inflexible. Unlike most countries where different ethnic groups live in separate homelands, the Hutu and Tutsi live together, speak the same language, and are separated only by their heritage.

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The politicization of ethnicity and social stratification along ethnic lines, coupled with deep poverty, have served to cause ethnic particularism and unending resentments between the two dominant groups. This severe and often violent problem in Burundi is compounded by high unemployment, high population density, environmental stress, and, to some extent, external factors.<sup>3</sup> The situation even crossed borders, and rivalries between Rwanda and Burundi and other nations within the region only added to domestic ethnic tensions. These, and other inexplicable reasons, have played their part in incubating ethnic (and consequently political) instability which in turn has severely affected Burundi's productive capacity, locking the nation in a vicious circle.

## PART I

### The Coming of Adventism to Burundi

The Adventist church in Burundi began in 1925 with the work of D. E. Delhove, a Belgian Adventist missionary who had worked in Kenya and Rwanda. He settled at a site at Buganda in Cibitoke, some 31 miles (50 km) from Usumbura in the west of Burundi, where he established the Buganda Mission. He remained there for a year, after which the work was taken over by one of the Rwandese missionaries who had accompanied him.

Maxine Duploux, a French missionary, took over in 1927. In 1931, the Urundi Mission was organized and officially became a part of the Congo Union Mission (CUM) which was transferred from the Northern European Division (NED) to the Southern African Division (SAD).

A second mission station was established in 1936 at Ndora, not far from Buganda. In 1937, Hans J. Moolman of South Africa arrived to run the Ndora Mission while Valentine Davies and his wife ran the Buganda Mission. By this time there were eleven schools attached to the Buganda Mission and twelve teachers working there.<sup>4</sup>

The Adventist schools did not discriminate among the tribes and indeed everyone was invited to become a member. The missionaries tended to play down the tribal differences, because they were only interested in the expansion of the church.

In 1932, C. W. Bozarth, president of the Central African Union Mission, which now included Rwanda-Burundi, reported on the progress of the hospital at

## TERMS

**Mwamis** – Tutsi monarchs

**Umusozi** – fiefdom of mwamis, usually a single hill

**Ubugabire system** – the Tutsi system of rulership in which most of the Hutus became serfs subjugated by and economically dependent on the minority Tutsi

**Ganwa** – leaders who vied for the thrones of the Mwamis

**Imboneza** – a group allegedly led by Simbare Aloise that intimidates and harasses those opposed to Joseph Ndikubwayo

**Adventist Women and Men Organization (AWMO)** – a group of lay Adventists who write letters and urge support of Lamec Barishinga

Ngoma, where Dr. J. H. Sturges was stationed,<sup>5</sup> plus, the four fields under the CAUM: the North Ruanda Mission Field, the South Ruanda Mission Field (which covered the Gitwe Mission and was also the headquarters of the CAUM), and the West Urundi Mission Field, which was based at Buganda.

Missionary J. L. Robinson wrote in 1932, about his experiences in the four mission stations at the CAUM. He had come as a special guest to the camp meetings and reported the tremendous growth of the church at that time. Within the first seven months of 1932, some 2,100 new converts had joined the church. The entry into the area, already heavily dominated by the Catholic church, caused a stir in the established denominations and the Adventist evangelists were actively barred from evangelizing by both the chiefs and the Catholic White Fathers.<sup>6</sup> In the Tutsi/Hutu rivalry, many Tutsi had become Catholic. Interest in the Adventist church peaked in August when well over 3,500 people attended camp meeting at Gitwe and 4,200 attended the Rwankeri camp meeting. It was reported that over 9,000 attended camp meetings that year.

Bands of Missionary Volunteer (MV) members went into the countryside and daily reports of their activities were sent back to mission stations. The growth was fast-

## TIMELINE

National Burundi events in regular font;  
Church events in *italics*

- 1916-1922 Belgians take over colonies, including Rwanda-Urundi, lost by Germany during WWI. Then it obtained a League of Nations mandate to rule which lasted until 1946.
- 1925 *First Adventist mission established in Urundi*
- 1928 *Adventist work in Rwanda-Urundi organized.*
- 1931 *Urundi Mission organized as part of Congo Union Mission, which is transferred from the Northern European Division to the Southern Africa Division*
- 1946 United Nations takes over Urundi and rules it as a trust territory
- 1962 UN grants independence to the Republic of Rwanda and the Kingdom of Burundi
- 1963 *The Central African Union Mission renamed the Ruanda-Urundi Union*
- 1964 Burundi and Rwanda break off diplomatic relations.  
  
*The Ruanda-Urundi Union renamed the Central African Union because of the diplomatic standoff. Burundi Field reorganized to sever ties with Rwanda.*  
  
Burundi prime minister shot and killed by Rwandan Tutsi, raising ethnic tensions
- 1965 Joseph Bamina, another Hutu, appointed prime minister  
  
Leopold Biha appointed prime minister  
  
Hutu policemen attempt a coup  
  
Mwami Mwambutsa flees the country
- 1966 Crown Prince Charles Ndzeye declares himself Mwami Ntare V  
Defense Minister Michel Micombero leads a coup and declares Burundi a Republic
- 1967 *Africans now running the Adventist Church in most other African countries, but the Europeans are deemed to be neutral in Rwanda/Burundi*

er than the Adventists had anticipated and, by the end of 1935, they had more than doubled their growth numbers to two-and-a-half times the estimates.<sup>7</sup> In December 1932, the first 100 songbooks in the Runyarwanda language were brought to Urundi.<sup>8</sup> These were all taken up with enthusiasm, even though by this time the language spoken in Urundi was differentiating itself from that spoken in Ruanda. In the future, it would be a source of contention between the two nations.

Bozarth testified to the enthusiasm for the Gospel that he found, declaring, “Never have I seen people so eager to accept and follow the truth as they are in Ruanda-Urundi today.” What might be of importance to note is that, particularly in Burundi, it was the majority Hutu people who were joining the church in such large numbers. The church had been founded in Cibitoke where the rural population was primarily Hutu.

Meanwhile, the colonial authorities strengthened their hold on power but preferred to work through the existing power structures. This meant the stratification of society along ethnic lines—in this case, the Tutsi were treated as superior while the majority Hutu were considered second-class citizens. Much has been written about the Belgian colonial authorities and their methods in the Congo and in Ruanda-Urundi, but suffice it to say that in the latter, they particularly enhanced the pre-colonial inequalities along the ethnic lines. They did not seek to institute any social reforms and insisted on maintaining the status quo.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the Belgians encouraged the *mwami* to phase out the *ubugabire* system in 1955.<sup>11</sup> By this time however, much of the Hutu anger over Tutsi domination was not directed at the colonial power of Belgium but to the local Tutsi themselves.<sup>12</sup>

In 1959, ethnic antagonisms in Rwanda erupted into violence. The Rwandan Tutsi king was deposed and he fled the country. An exodus of some 200,000 Tutsi followed, many of whom went to Burundi, while others crossed over to Congo. In the run-up to independence, various African countries criticized the move to split the two nations, fearing civil war.

In the Adventist church, the Ruanda-Urundi Union was organized in 1960, separating it from the Congo Union Mission, which had been established in 1925.<sup>13</sup> W. R. Vail was appointed the first president. The veteran missionary had first come to the Congo Mission back in

1933 and had even served at Buganda Mission in Urundi. The secretary-treasurer was M. B. Musgrave. The new offices moved from Elizabethville (Lubumbashi) to Usumbura (the capital of Ruanda-Urundi). At this time, the Ruanda side had three fields—North Ruanda, South Ruanda, and West Ruanda—while the Urundi side had only the Urundi Field.<sup>14</sup> Of the four, only the Urundi Field and the West Ruanda Field were fully Africanized by independence. The North Ruanda Field was headed by H. E. Kotz while the South Ruanda Field was under F. L. Bell and the West Ruanda Field was under Ezekiel Semugeshi.<sup>15</sup>

The senior African official in the union at this time was S. Ntirikwira (departmental secretary for church development). In the Urundi Field, the president was Mariko Sembagare, vice president was Ezekiel Munyankiko, and secretary-treasurer was Labani Biyayire.

### **Independence and Continuity**

When the UN General Assembly voted in 1962 to end its trusteeship and grant independence, it created the Republic of Rwanda and the Kingdom of Burundi. Burundi became a constitutional monarchy under Mwami Mwambutsa IV. André Muhirwa, a Tutsi, became premier, replacing Prince Louis Rwagasore, son of King Mwambutsa IV, who had been assassinated shortly before independence. Muhirwa, a relative of Rwagasore, only lasted a year before being replaced by Pierre Ngendandumwe, a Hutu. He too did not last long and in 1964 he resigned after Mwami Mwambutsa IV dismissed four Tutsi ministers for allegedly fomenting anti-Hutu sentiments. He was replaced by Albin Nyamoya, also a Hutu. The first few months of independence were characterized by political volatility.

Meanwhile, the Adventist church continued to grow tremendously in the joint Ruanda-Urundi region. By 1963, the joint population of the church in both Rwanda and Burundi stood at 55,583 members, by far the largest of all the Southern African Division's seven unions (29%).

### **Reorganization of the Adventist Church**

In 1964, Burundi's relations with neighboring Rwanda (whose government was now dominated by the Hutu) became frosty, and the two nations broke off diplomatic

relations.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the Ruanda-Urundi Union was renamed the Central Africa Union, partly because the two nations had broken off diplomatic relations, necessitating a change of name. It continued to be based in Bujumbura and this obviously made it difficult for the Adventist church to operate in both Rwanda and Burundi now that the two nations were not seeing eye to eye.

The Burundi Field, which also incorporated two provinces in Rwanda, was reorganized to sever the ties with Rwanda. A second field was organized in Burundi, the East Burundi Field based in Gitega, while the older Burundi Field was renamed the West Burundi Field and remained in Ndora. The West Burundi Field came under Labani Biyayire while the East Burundi Field was headed by Ezekiel Munyankiko, with Eliya Nyagatema as his deputy.<sup>17</sup> The union was still in European hands, with W. R. Vail giving way to A. H. Brandt that same year. Frank Unger became the secretary-treasurer.

Meanwhile, Mwami Mwambutsa IV reappointed Ngendandumwe as prime minister in January 1965. Shortly after his appointment he was shot and killed by a Rwandan Tutsi, raising ethnic tensions and worsening the already bad cross-border tensions. Joseph Bamina, another Hutu, was appointed to replace him.<sup>18</sup>

After a tense election held in May 1965, the Hutu gained a majority in the National Assembly but Mwami Mwambutsa IV appointed Leopold Biha, a Tutsi, as prime minister. This move proved quite unpopular, further raising ethnic tensions. In October 1965, a group of Hutu policemen attempted a coup, accusing the Mwami of causing intrigues to hold on to power. Loyalist police led by Captain Michel Micombero, said to be the son of a Tutsi father and a Hutu mother, thwarted the rebels. But then the Mwami fled the country to Switzerland causing a power vacuum.

On July 8, 1966 his son, Crown Prince Charles Ndizeye, just 19, deposed the absent king and declared himself Mwami Ntare V, ending his father's fifty-one-year reign. Only months later, on November 28, Michel Micombero, who had been named defense minister, led a coup which deposed the Mwami and declared Burundi a republic. He placed the Mwami under house arrest and appointed himself president at the age of 26. He established a National Revolutionary Committee to help stabilize his regime and develop the economy. Tutsi domination con-



tinued, with most of them filling powerful government positions, including the cabinet.

### **Further Changes in the Adventist Church**

In 1967, A. H. Brandt was replaced by P. G. Werner as the head of the Central African Union. While most other church organizations in Africa were now being run by Africans, the Europeans were deemed to be neutral in Rwanda-Burundi, still in the grip of ethnic and cross-border tensions. In Burundi, minor tensions erupted in 1969, along ethnic lines and the government thwarted what was possibly a coup in the making led by Hutu rebels with the suspected assistance of the Belgian government.<sup>19</sup>

In the Adventist church, Phineas Manyori replaced Ezekiel Munyankiko in the East Burundi Field in 1969, while Ezekiel Munyankiko moved to the West Burundi Field replacing Biyayire.<sup>20</sup> By 1971 there were forty-one churches in the West Burundi Field with 6,930 members while East Burundi Union had six churches with 361 members.<sup>21</sup> The union remained under Werner but the new administrative secretary was Eliazafani Ntakirutimana, a Rwandan Hutu. Born in Kibuye, Rwanda in 1924, Ntakirutimana would be convicted of a role in the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, together with his son Gerard. He served ten years in prison and died in January 2007, a month after being released. His son remains in prison.

The appointment of Ntakirutimana and other senior Rwandese pastors to the church in Burundi, only served to create local Burundian resentment at what they termed as an influx of Rwandese pastors. When the Central Africa Union was dissolved, most Rwandese pastors returned to Rwanda, again creating a vacuum in Burundi since not many Burundians had received senior pastoral education to serve in higher capacities. This fact (and many others) would slow the work in Burundi which today still holds the status of “union mission” while Rwanda has already attained “union conference” status. This means that Rwanda has attained higher autonomy, electing its officers rather than having them appointed by the division as is the case for Burundi, and the cause for the current conflict.

### **Deepening Ethnic Conflict**

In April 1972, a Hutu uprising led to widespread massacres claiming at least 100,000 lives, mainly Hutu.

The violence arose following the arrest of Ntare V upon his return from exile in West Germany, despite a written guarantee that he would be allowed a safe return. On April 29, an attempt by Tutsi royalists failed to free Ntare V. Instead, he was killed alongside thousands of Tutsis. The Tutsi-led reprisals were particularly brutal.<sup>22</sup> Nearly 100,000 Hutus were killed in targeted massacres of any Hutu with a secondary education, including teachers, civil servants, and religious leaders, among others.<sup>23</sup> Three of the former cabinet ministers were also among those killed.<sup>24</sup>

The uprising was eventually quelled, but unrest continued, and nearly 50,000 Hutus fled to nearby countries. Over the months, the number would rise to over 200,000.<sup>25</sup> The following year matters were no better as reports came in that the fleeing refugees had organized themselves into rebel forces. Government forces fought them and at least 10,000 Hutu rebels were said to have been killed. The government accused Belgium, Israel, Tanzania, and Rwanda for supporting Hutu rebels and severed ties with Israel. The effect of this was a perennial sense of suspicion between the Bujumbura government and regional nations harboring Burundian refugees. The UN estimated that 85,000 Hutus had fled Burundi and over 500,000 had been internally displaced.

The Hutu being in power in Rwanda led to deep suspicion between Burundi and Rwanda. In March 1973, the Burundi government launched airstrikes targeting refugee camps in Tanzania, leading to a diplomatic standoff and blockade of Burundi by withholding goods in the port of Dar es Salaam.

In July 1974, a new Republican Constitution was promulgated. The next year regional tensions eased when the Rwandan president, Juvenal Habyarimana, visited Burundi and neighboring Zaire moved Burundi refugees to at least 90 miles from the border. This served to quell jitters of cross-border attacks from armed rebels.

In 1974, Phineas Nsengiyumva took over the East Burundi Field replacing Manyori. The church in this region was not growing as fast and by 1975 it had nine churches, up from six in 1971, and 840 members.<sup>26</sup> The following year the Central Africa Union, which still comprised the two nations, replaced Werner with L. C. Robinson. Roy Stotz remained secretary while E. Nyagetema became the executive secretary for Burundi and S. Sembeba became

the executive secretary for Rwanda.<sup>27</sup> Ntakirutimana became the Stewardship and Church Development director at the union.<sup>28</sup>

The following year, in November 1976, Burundi President Michel Micombero was deposed by the military and 30-year old Lt. Col. Jean-Baptiste Bagaza became the new president. The Constitution of 1974 was suspended. Bagaza, a Tutsi, tried to create national reconciliation to bring together the Hutu and Tutsi. But ethnic tensions continued. Targeted killings occurred in 1979 and many Hutu sought refuge in Rwanda.

At a Franco-African summit held in Kigali, President Bagaza was incensed by a pamphlet put out by a religious group critical of the Tutsi hegemony in Burundi. He left the summit early and from June 1 began the expulsion of twelve Belgian Catholic missionaries, followed by fifty-two others ten days later. They were accused of, among other things, drafting and distributing anti-government tracts.

### **Burundi Adventist Church Placed Under the Africa-Indian Ocean Division**

Meanwhile, in 1979, DeWitt S. Williams replaced Werner at the Central African Union.<sup>29</sup> In 1980, the Africa-Indian Ocean Division was organized to replace the dissolved Southern African Division. Part of the territory of the Southern African Division went to the Trans-Africa Division based in Harare, Zimbabwe. The Africa-Indian Ocean Division was based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

Within the Burundi church, in 1980, Saul Senkomo took over as president of the East Burundi Field. Senkomo, a veteran translator of Adventist literature and the Sabbath School lesson into the Kirundi language, would eventually rise to become Burundi Union Mission president.

In 1980, President Bagaza instituted reforms in the country's sole party, Uprona, which was dominated by the Tutsi, and thus largely ignored by the Hutu. In November 1981, a new constitution established Burundi as a single-party nation with a directly elected president. The most vocal opposition to the government became the clergy, creating frosty relations between the church and the state.

A national referendum was held and the constitution passed with 98.6% of the vote. The nation's sole legal po-

## **TIMELINE** CONTINUED

- 1971 *Eliazafani Ntakirutimana named executive secretary of the Central African Union under P. G. Werner. Ntakirutimana would later be convicted of war crimes in the Rwandan genocide.*
- 1972 Hutu uprising followed by brutal Tutsi reprisals
- 1974 New Republican Constitution adopted
- 1976 President Micombero deposed as president. He is replaced by Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, a Tutsi. The 1974 Constitution is suspended. Bagaza, incensed by a religious pamphlet, expels Catholic missionaries.
- 1980 *The Africa-Indian Ocean Division organized to replace the dissolved Southern African Division*  
  
*S. Senkomo, a veteran translator, takes over as president of the East Burundi Field*
- 1981 New Constitution establishes Burundi as a single-party nation with a directly elected president
- 1984 Bagaza reelected. Ten Belgian missionaries expelled. Suspicion of foreign missionaries and blaming them for the violence between Hutu and Tutsi.  
  
Decree banning all denominational activity, including church attendance  
  
*African-Indian Ocean Division dissolves the Central Africa Union Mission and designates Burundi as an attached field, consequently the West Burundi and East Burundi Fields are dissolved. Home churches flourish and denominational activity continues in the absence of a formal church structure.*  
  
*Meanwhile, Rwanda is elevated to union mission status with American Robert G. Peck appointed as president*
- 1987 Bagaza deposed. Pierre Buyoya, also a Tutsi, becomes head of the Military Committee of National Redemption that now leads the country. The National Assembly is dissolved and the constitution suspended.  
  
Restrictions eased on churches and 200 political prisoners released

## TIMELINE CONTINUED

- 1987 *African-Indian Ocean Division reorganizes the church. Silas Senkomo named president of the Burundi Mission*
  
- 1988 Ethnic violence erupts  
  
Hutu prime minister Adrien Sibomana appointed
  
- 1989 *Adventist church in Burundi regains its properties that had been nationalized*
  
- 1990 National referendum on charter passes  
  
National Security Council replaces Tutsi-dominated Committee for National Salvation  
  
New draft constitution creates a part-presidential and part-parliamentary system of government. Prime minister to be appointed by the president and accorded wide range of powers.
  
- 1992 New constitution adopted, includes a multiparty system, directly elected president as head of state, National Assembly, and a prime minister as head of government  
  
Buyoya survives an attempted coup
  
- 1993 Melchior Ndadaye, the first Hutu elected president in national elections. Silvie Kinigi, a Tutsi, named prime minister, the first (and only) woman to hold the position.  
  
Ndadaye deposed in a Tutsi-led coup after only three months in power  
  
Thousands die in ensuing ethnic violence  
  
Cyprien Ntaryamira, another Hutu, comes to power as president. He attends a regional peace meeting with Rwanda's president Juvenal Habyarimana. Their plane is shot down approaching Kigali, killing them both.
  
- 1994 Ethnic bloodbath in Rwanda ensues. More than one million Tutsi and moderate Hutu killed.  
  
Sylvestre Ntibantunganye, president of the Burundi National Assembly, announces the death of the Burundi president and appeals for calm.

litical party at that time remained the Uprona. The constitution reaffirmed freedom of religion and freedom for private schools (these were mostly run by the Catholics, who were at odds with the state already).

In August 1984, Bagaza was reelected to the presidency as the single candidate of Uprona, garnering 99.63% of the 1.7 million votes cast. The Hutu majority only had five of nineteen ministerial positions and ten of the sixty-five seats in the National Assembly. Frosty relations with the church saw the expulsion of ten Belgian missionaries accused of spreading slanderous information about Burundi in Europe. This was the culmination of suspicion by the government that foreign missionaries favored the Hutu majority and were blamed for being responsible for the mass communal violence between the Hutu and Tutsi, which had occurred in neighboring Rwanda before and after independence in 1962, and also in Burundi itself in 1972 and 1973.

### Closure of the Adventist Church in Burundi

In 1984, President Bagaza issued a decree to ban all denominational activity including church attendance. All churches, including the Catholic church where two-thirds of Burundians belonged, were closed and Catholic schools were nationalized. Bagaza banned weekly religious services and nationalized the Catholic radio station. Adventists resorted to meeting in homes and conducting their affairs clandestinely.

The previous year, DeWitt Williams had left his position as the Central African Union president and the position remained vacant until Ntwali Ruhaya was appointed in an acting capacity. For the first time, the union was coming under non-European hands. Ntwali Ruhaya had served as the field secretary for the Africa-Indian Ocean Division, now based in Harare, Zimbabwe, as well as the president of the East Zaire Field.<sup>30</sup>

### Dissolving the Central Africa Union Mission

The police violence, press censorship, and religious suppression in Burundi were criticized by human rights groups internationally. As a result of the closure of denominational activity, the Africa-Indian Ocean Division dissolved the Central Africa Union Mission and designated Burundi as an "attached field" under the division (then based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast). This meant that the en-



tire country was downgraded to “mission field” status and consequently the West Burundi and East Burundi Fields were dissolved. The affairs of the church (now in hiding) were managed in the first year by U. Habingabwa as the secretary and D. Barute as treasurer. There was no president.

On the other hand, Rwanda was elevated to union mission status and Robert G. Peck was appointed as its president.<sup>31</sup> Robert Peck, an American, had been the secretary of the Iowa-Missouri Conference.<sup>32</sup> The Rwanda Union Mission offices were now located in Kimihurura in Kigali. Just like the Catholic church, the Adventists in Burundi lost prime church property, including their address at 126 Avenue Prince Louis Rwagasore.

Meanwhile, home churches flourished and denominational activity continued to thrive in the absence of a formal church structure.

### Restoration of the Adventist Church in Burundi

On September 3, 1987, Bagaza’s eleven-year rule ended when he was deposed in a military coup while attending a conference of French-speaking nations in Quebec, Canada. He was not permitted to reenter the country. The new leader, 38-year-old Major Pierre Buyoya, also a Tutsi, became the head of the Military Committee of National Redemption. The National Assembly was dissolved and the constitution was suspended, as the Military Committee for National Salvation assumed executive and legislative authority. Two weeks into his presidency, he eased restrictions on the church and released more than 200 political prisoners.

There was joy in Burundi in Adventist circles when the government lifted the ban on religious activities towards the end of 1987. The Africa-Indian Ocean Division quickly reorganized the church and appointed Silas Senkomo, formerly the head of the East Burundi Field, as the new president of the Burundi Mission. While under the ban, the church grew, with evangelism work continuing, baptisms taking place under the cover of darkness,

and mission work going on in silence. The church added to its numbers well over 10,000 in that short period, with membership now over 31,000, compared to about 19,000 members prior to the closure. The number of churches

also jumped to ninety-two.<sup>33</sup> The growth of the church remained largely in the Cibitoke province which held more than 70% of all Adventists in Burundi at that time.<sup>34</sup>

In 1988, ethnic violence erupted in northern Burundi, ignited by a particularly inflammatory speech by a Tutsi administrator. President Buyoya moved to assuage Hutu resentment of their subordinate status by appointing a Hutu prime minister, Adrien Sibomana, who was the governor of the Muravya Province (see map). He also appointed more Hutu to

the Cabinet to match the number of Tutsi.

In 1989, the Adventist church in Burundi regained its properties that had been nationalized, including the address at 126 Prince Louis Rwagasore Avenue. There was a revival in membership with the baptism of many who could not be baptized in hiding.<sup>35</sup>

In May 1990, President Buyoya launched a draft “National Unity pact” which came from the recommendations of the National Commission on the Question of National Unity. It was to be submitted to the extraordinary session of the Uprona and subjected to a national referendum. Buyoya instituted a National Security Council to replace the Tutsi-dominated Committee for National Salvation. The new National Security Council would have both military and civilian members, including the Hutu prime minister, Adrien Sibomana.

The following year, the charter was passed in a national referendum by 89% of the votes cast. Concerns about the unrest in Rwanda (led by exiled Tutsi rebels based in Uganda) spilling over to Burundi continued to cause tensions. Further political reforms were instituted with President Buyoya announcing a new draft constitution that would create a part-presidential and a part-parliamentary system of government. There would be a prime minister

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affairs clandestinely.*

appointed by the president and accorded a wide range of powers.

The new constitution, adopted in March 1992, introduced a multi-party system, with a directly elected president as head of state, an eighty-one-member National Assembly, and a prime minister as head of government. Shortly before the referendum however, Buyoya survived an attempted coup. About thirty Tutsi soldiers were arrested. The government blamed the former president, Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, and former Tutsi ministers Isidore Nyaboya and Cyprien Mbonimpa for the coup attempt. By this time, Buyoya's reforms were strongly opposed by the clandestine Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (Palipehutu), which had been engaged in armed struggle against the Tutsi-controlled military. Burundi accused Rwanda of sheltering and financing the Palipehutu fighters.

### More Conflict in Burundi

With the new constitution in place, elections were called and on June 1, 1993, history was made when the nation elected Melchior Ndadaye the first Hutu president, resoundingly defeating incumbent Pierre Buyoya. Ndadaye appointed Silvie Kinigi a Tutsi, as the new prime minister, the first (and only) woman to hold the position.

In October that year, after only three months in power, Ndadaye was deposed in a Tutsi-led military coup and killed. Kinigi fled to the French Embassy in Bujumbura and the Organization of African Unity sent in 200 troops to protect the government. The coup however collapsed as senior military officers failed to back it and there was also little popular support for it. Meanwhile thousands died in the ensuing ethnic violence and hundreds of thousands more fled to neighboring countries as refugees.

When the coup collapsed, another Hutu president, Cyprien Ntaryamira, came to power. While attending a regional peace meeting with Rwanda's president, Juvenal Habyarimana, their plane was shot down as they approached Kigali, killing both of them instantly. This triggered an ethnic bloodbath in Rwanda unlike any that had been witnessed anywhere in the world, save perhaps the Holocaust. More than one million Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed in what became an international tragedy of unimaginable proportions. Reprisals were muted in Burundi and this was partly attributed to efforts by previous governments aimed at national unity and reconciliation

between the two ethnic groups. Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, then president of the National Assembly, announced the death of Ntaryamira and appealed for calm. He saved the day for Burundi.

Meanwhile, on March 10, 1994, the General Conference hosted two Burundi cabinet ministers at a luncheon in their honor while on tour in Washington, DC. The two, the minister of finance, Salvator Toyi, and the minister of state for external relations and cooperation, Jean-Marie Ngendahayo, were received at the General Conference in Maryland, a sign that the Adventist church was receiving favorable regard back in Burundi.<sup>36</sup>

### Burundi After the Rwanda Genocide

The Rwandan Patriotic Front came to power in Rwanda, while in Burundi the Hutu-led Frodebu entered a power sharing-deal with the Tutsi-led Uprona. Frodebu got the presidency and the foreign ministry while Uprona got the premiership and the interior ministry. Defense and justice ministries would go to "neutral" figures. They also agreed that presidential decisions would have to be countersigned by the prime minister. Sylvestre Ntibantunganya of Frodebu became president on September 30, 1994. His rule, however, lacked real power, which remained with the army. Reprisal attacks by both sides of the ethnic divide caused significant tensions.

According to Human Rights Watch, foreign governments actively took sides in the Burundi affair which kept the conflict alive. They accused the French, Chinese, and South African arms dealers, in league with Colombian drug syndicates, of fanning the conflict. In January 1996, President Ntibantunganya warned that Burundi was on the brink of collapse. In March, the Security Council voted against recommendations by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to send UN guards to protect aid workers in Burundi and to establish a force in Zaire capable of intervention in Burundi. Further proposals for bringing stability, particularly by the armed Hutu opposition Forces for Defense of Democracy (FDD), came to nothing.

In 1995, President Ntibantunganya appointed Sylvestre Mvutse, an Adventist, as the governor of Cibitoke province, the traditional heartland of the Adventist Church in Burundi. Mvutse was a former student of the Adventist University of Central Africa and was married

to the daughter of Silas Senkomo, the late union mission president.<sup>37</sup>

## The Return of Buyoya

The constitution was suspended and the National Assembly dissolved after another Tutsi-led military coup on July 25, 1996. Ntibantunganya was deposed and former president Buyoya was reinstalled. A transitional constitution was adopted in June 1998 that made the president both head of state and head of government and eliminated the position of prime minister.

In July 1997, sporadic fighting broke out in Cibitoke and Bubanza provinces. Remember that Cibitoke was the traditional birthplace of the Adventist church and lots of Adventists were affected by the fighting.

On August 28, 2000, an important milestone was achieved when a transitional government was agreed upon following the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. It would be in place for five years. This failed to create a ceasefire but created an important background for future power-sharing agreements. Then, in October 2001, a new constitution was approved that provided for a three-year transitional administration designed to share power between Hutu and Tutsi parties. It also created a new, two-chamber legislative body. In 2003, a new cease-fire agreement was signed between the government and the largest Hutu rebel group, now known as CNDD-FDD (created by the merger of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy and the Forces for the Defense of Democracy).

## Nkurunziza Comes to Power

The CNDD-FDD performed well in the elections of 2005, and the National Assembly voted in Pierre Nkurunziza as president. He was sworn in in August for a five-year term. He won the next election and was sworn in for a second term in August 2010. In April 2015, Nkurunziza caused controversy by announcing that he would be seeking another term in office in what his opponents interpreted as a third term, against the constitution. Tensions mounted when demonstrators opposed to him took to the streets in protests. Several people were killed, and a government crackdown saw the closure of some radio stations. This prompted the intervention of the international community, including the United Nations and the African Union. Tens of thousands fled the country.

## TIMELINE CONTINUED

- 1994 *General Conference hosts two Burundi cabinet ministers at luncheon in Silver Spring*
- Ntibantunganya becomes president in October
- Human Rights Watch reports foreign governments took sides in Burundi, keeping the conflict alive
- 1995 *Ntibantunganya appoints Sylvestre Mvutse, an Adventist, governor of Cibitoke province, heartland of the Adventist church*
- 1996 Ntibantunganya announces Burundi on the brink of collapse
- Tutsi-led military coup deposes Ntibantunganya and former president Buyoya reinstalled
- 1997 Sporadic fighting in Cibitoke and Bubanza provinces, affecting Adventists
- 1998 Transitional constitution adopted making the president both head of state and head of government, eliminating prime minister position
- 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement brings in transitional government
- 2001 New Constitution approved providing for three-year transitional administration designed to share power between Hutu and Tutsi parties
- 2003 Cease-fire agreement signed between the government and the largest Hutu rebel group known as CNDD-FDD
- 2005 Pierre Nkurunziza elected president by the National Assembly. He serves two five-year terms, and then announces he would seek a third term, not allowed under the Constitution.
- 2015 Tensions mount after Nkurunziza's announcement of wanting a third term. United Nations and African Union intervene as thousands flee country.
- Nkurunziza survives an attempted coup
- 2015 Nkurunziza reelected
- Burundi Union Mission re-constituted. East Central Africa Division names Joseph Ndikubwayo president; Paul Irakoze, executive secretary; Leonard Biratevye, treasurer.*

## TIMELINE CONTINUED

- 2018** Nkurunziza announces he will step down after the 2020 elections.  
*April – Leonard Biratevye removed from office for financial mismanagement.*  
*July – TMI Evangelistic Campaign, 43,000 people baptized.*  
*November – ECD dismisses Joseph Ndikubwayo as president and names Lamec Barishinga to replace him.*
- 2019** *Lamec Barishinga arrested and imprisoned*

In May 2015, Nkurunziza survived a coup attempt mounted by his former head of intelligence, General Godefroid Niyombare. The elections, held in July 2015, saw Nkurunziza beat his closest rival, Agathon Rwasa, by a total of 69.41% of the ballot to Rwasa's 18.99%. In May 2018, Burundi held a national constitutional referendum to establish a seven-year term limit in what would have seen Nkurunziza remain in office until 2034 (if he ran in 2020 and remained for two terms). The referendum raised tensions and was condemned by the opposition, the Catholic bishops, and the international community. He continues in his third term with elections due in August 2020. In June 2018, he announced that he would step down after the 2020 elections.

## PART II

### The Present Crisis in the Adventist Church in Burundi

In September 2015, the Burundi Union Mission was reconstituted and the new officers named by the East Central Africa Division (ECD) were Joseph Ndikubwayo as president, Paul Irakoze as executive secretary, and Léonard Biratevye as treasurer. Due to the ethnic situation in Burundi, the national government had adopted a system of ethnic balancing where if the president was Hutu, it would follow that the first vice president would be a Tutsi. This arrangement was adopted by many organizations across the board, including the Adventist church. The only problem was that there were only two Tutsis serving as ordained minis-

ters in the Adventist church in Burundi. These were Lambert Ntiguma and Paul Irakoze. Ntiguma had already served his term as executive secretary in the outgoing administration. So, it fell on Irakoze as the next available Tutsi to take up the position.

Paul Irakoze was born in October 1979, in Cibitoke in North West Burundi. He studied at Bugema University in Uganda and graduated in 2010 with a BA in theology. After his graduation, he became a pastor in Gitega District for a year and then became field secretary in the East Burundi Field. He was ordained in 2013 in Bujumbura. In 2015 he became executive secretary, taking over from Ntiguma who had held the executive secretary post for five years.

President Ndikubwayo is a second-generation Adventist, the son of Silas Senkomo, a veteran Adventist pastor and translator of Adventist literature. Ndikubwayo was born in March 1963 in Bujumbura and attended the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) in Rwanda before proceeding to the Adventist Seminary of West Africa in Nigeria (now Babcock University) where he obtained an MA in religion (issued by Andrews University) in 1994. When he returned, he was appointed chaplain at Lycée Maranatha de Kivoga. Afterwards he became the Education director for the Burundi Attached Territory, which at that time was under the Africa-Indian Ocean Division (AID). In 2014, he obtained a DMin in global mission in leadership from AUA (issued by Andrews University). In September 2015, he was appointed the president of the Burundi Union Mission.

Ndikubwayo became the second president of the Burundi Union Mission after it had been elevated to union mission status in 2012 and the fourth head of the church since the ban on denominational activity had been lifted by the government in 1987. In 2000, the Burundi Mission was authorized to create three fields— East Burundi, North Burundi, and West Burundi. In 2003, the Burundi Field had been transferred from the Abidjan-based Africa-Indian Ocean Division (AID) to the Nairobi-based East-Central Africa Division (ECD) and it retained its status as an attached territory. In 2012 it was elevated to a union mission, so its officers would still be appointed by the division.

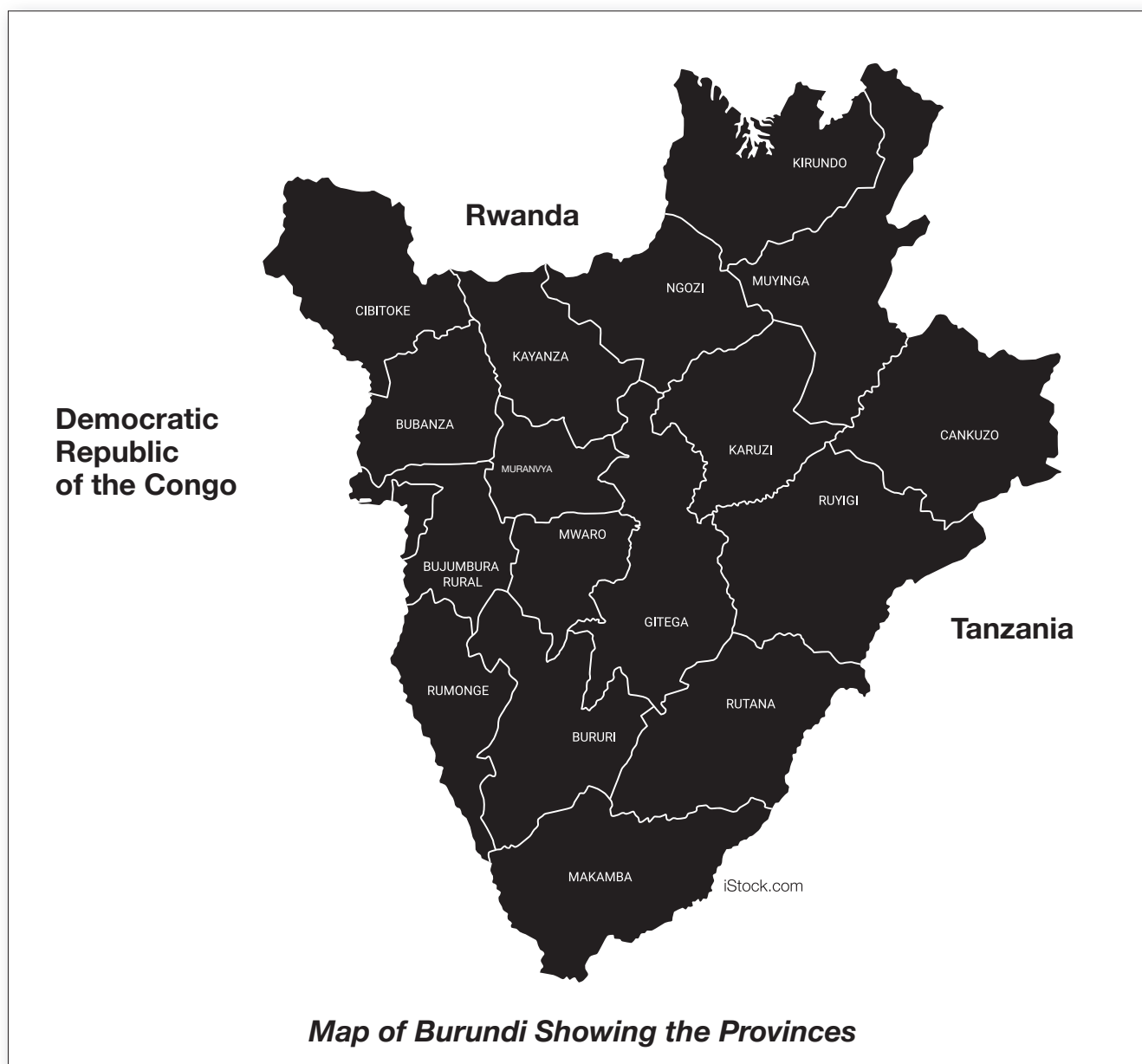
## The Making of a Dysfunctional Administration

In the early days after their appointment in 2015, Secretary Irakoze pointed out what he considered to be mistakes in their administration. First, he was uncomfortable that the president's wife, Blandine Ngahimbare (Mrs. Ndikubwayo), worked at ADRA Burundi as the head of finance. Being a senior position of accountability that requires independence of action, the secretary amicably approached the president about it, asking if he would have her serve elsewhere or at least in another capacity. He reasoned with the president that finance was normally sensitive, particularly when handling donor funds, and the position could easily attract a conflict of interest since he (the

president) was the board chair of ADRA Burundi.<sup>38</sup> The president strongly objected to the secretary's sentiments and even dismissed his concerns as a non-issue. This issue refused to die and would set in motion a chain of events that would culminate in the dissolution of ADRA Burundi. (For more on the hiring of Mrs. Ndikubwayo, see the section under ADRA Burundi).

## A Crisis of Accountability

In 2017, Secretary Irakoze commenced his MDiv studies at the Adventist University of Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. He needed a ticket to fly to Nairobi to attend classes. Treasurer Biratevye blatantly refused to grant him the





ticket stating that it was not in the budget. Irakoze argued that he was entitled to travel by air by virtue of his office and did not see why he should be denied the ticket. He explained that he felt insecure travelling by road since many roadblocks were manned by some of the militia operating in Burundi. Biratevye complied and issued the ticket, but he charged it to Irakoze's personal account. Eventually, the charges to Irakoze's personal account, even for official duties, would amount to over BIF 8,000,000 (\$4,200) all of which were treated as a personal debt.

Housing was another point of contention. President Ndikubwayo discovered that Secretary Irakoze and Treasurer Biratevye had rented houses costing more than the agreed-upon allowance. The treasurer was paying BIF 600,000 (\$320) instead of the agreed BIF 500,000 (\$267). Both the secretary and treasurer were entitled to be housed by the BUM at a cost of BIF 500,000, while the president was entitled to BIF 600,000 in housing. The treasurer was paying the same for all of them. The president asked that the difference be charged to their personal accounts, but the treasurer did not act.

On another occasion, the secretary discovered that the treasurer had been transferring funds from a church-owned rental house (\$600/month) into his private account for more than two years. He also discovered that the lessee had been provided with fake church receipts. When Irakoze pointed out the matter to the president, Ndikubwayo played it down and warned Irakoze to keep off the matter. The secretary wondered why he would protect what was clearly a case of theft by a senior officer of the union. When asked about the matter for this story, Ndikubwayo stated that he was not aware of the house rental funds going into the personal account of the treasurer.

Seeing that there was no action by the president on the errant treasurer, Irakoze reported the matter to the division. The move only served to escalate their differ-

ences. Ndikubwayo began to suspect that Irakoze was working closely with the treasurer at the division, Jerome Habimana, to frustrate him. Habimana is Rwandese but, like Irakoze, is a Tutsi. The matter now took on an ethnic dimension, fanned by the traditional cross-border rivalry between Burundi and Rwanda. When a General Conference Auditing Services (GCAS) audit conducted in October 2018, covering the financial years 2016 and 2017, discovered that six months' rent in that period amounting to US\$3,600, "was not recorded in the accounts of the Union...",<sup>39</sup> it exonerated the secretary, but the same report also implicated him in a book project which he had initiated.

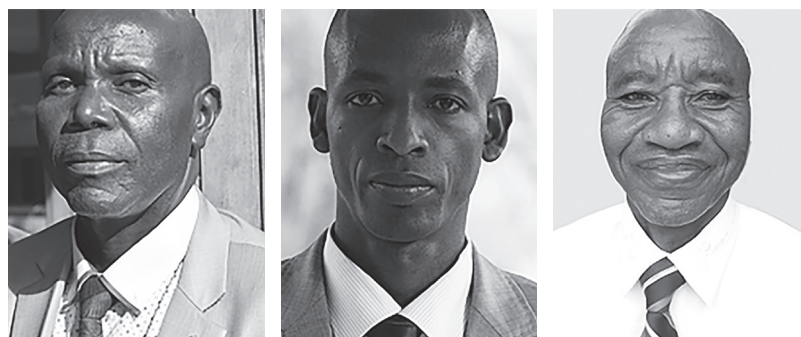
### The Book Project

In 2016, Secretary Irakoze was impressed by a book

entitled *Steps to Personal Revival* by a German author, that was translated into Kirundi under the title *Intambuko kuyindi yo kuzuzwa Mpwemu Yera*. The secretary felt that the book would benefit the people of Burundi and decided to print

100,000 copies to be shared out to the 200,000 church members.

The secretary approached a German donor, who agreed to finance the printing estimated at US\$50,000. He asked the secretary if he could send the money to him via Western Union. The secretary declined stating that such funds would best be handled through official church channels. He gave him the ECD accounts and the money was wired there. The treasurer, Biratevye at that point, was responsible for handling the money after it was released by the division. He successfully converted the US\$50,000 into local currency and banked the funds in the union accounts. The signatories to the accounts were the president, secretary, and treasurer with the instruction that any two could sign the funds provided one of them was the treasurer. The secretary co-signed most of the cheques but did this also because there were times



Burundi Union Mission leadership as listed on the ECD website: President Lamec Barishinga, left; Secretary Paul Irakoze, middle; Treasurer Daniel Bavugubusa, right. (SOURCE: East Central Africa Division: [ecdadventist.org/burundi](http://ecdadventist.org/burundi)).

he would have to be away in Kenya as a student at the Adventist University of Africa.

According to Irakoze, there were many issues he noted in the transactions regarding the books, but when he confronted the treasurer about them, no credible answers were forthcoming. So Irakoze reported the matter to the division, which requested GCAS investigate the book project.

By the time the auditors scheduled a visit in 2018 to Burundi Union Mission, various other financial issues had arisen including a change in the treasurer's position.

For his part, prior to the October 2018 visit by GCAS, Irakoze accepted a call to travel to Australia to conduct a series of evangelistic campaigns with the Burundi community over there, so he was away in Australia when the auditors arrived at the BUM offices.

GCAS sent two auditors, one a Rwandese (a Hutu) and the other a Cameroonian. The primary interviewees were the now removed treasurer, Biratevyé, the new treasurer, Bavugubusa, and the president, Ndikubwayo. The secretary returned to find the audit nearing its end and answered queries asked. What he did not realize was that, in his absence, a large part of the explanation of the book project's finances had been done by Biratevyé and the president, who, according to him, used the chance to get back at him.<sup>40</sup> Both of them had been bitter that the secretary had occasioned the dismissal of Biratevyé, even though the division had not considered the book project in his dismissal, rather the general mismanagement of his docket.

Treasurer Biratevyé reportedly told the auditors that he had co-signed the cheques with the secretary and that he had shared the proceeds from the book with him. The auditors also discovered that the invoices and receipts filed in the BUM offices had not emanated from the book printers.

The replacement treasurer, Daniel Bavugubusa, defended the absent secretary, arguing that he could not have been involved in the misappropriation of the funds when in fact he had initiated the whole process and had been the whistleblower to the fraudulent activities of the former treasurer that eventually led to the auditors being appointed.<sup>41</sup>

The auditors made their findings in a report that was released to the division on October 18, 2018. A section

of the five-page document, in French, under the sub-title “*Manque d’Intégrité et mauvaise gestion de l’Impression de livres*” (Lack of Integrity and Mismanagement of Book Printing) stated:

The audit procedures revealed that certain transactions appearing to order books and evangelization materials printed in a certain printing press in the amount of 41,845,380 BIF were fraudulently recorded with the fake vouchers. The outgoing Treasurer has admitted that he has been forced to support 18,174,380 BIF on his own, and two that he has confirmed that he has shared the funds with the Executive Secretary, which he has categorically denied. However, the Executive Secretary confirmed to us that he did not see the 7,131 books (Kwuzuwa, Mpwemu Yera) at the price of 13,050,000 BIF of December 13, 2016 which he was co-signing with the Treasurer. The surprising thing is that on March 29, 2017, the Executive Secretary signed again with the Treasurer another check for 5,585 books (Kwuzuwa, Mpemmu Yera) at the price of 10,621,000 BIF he confirmed to us that he did not see those books.<sup>42</sup> These two book orders were recorded in the account “Revival Expenses” that the Executive Secretary was in charge because it was the one which had requested the funds for this project.<sup>43</sup> Other book orders were posted to the “Evangelism Expense” and “Department Expense” accounts. No vote of the committee authorized the printing of all those books which had false documentation and no control was put in place to monitor the use of these funds by the benefactor who agreed to finance the translation impression of this book because the administration could not provide us with how these books were printed and how they were distributed to the members of the church. With the exception of a general vote BUM 17EXECOM No. 006 of January 30, 2017 which was taken by the Executive Committee which does not indicate the amount and the number to print worded in these terms “Vote to print and distribute to members of the

Church delivered it “Kwuzuwa, Mpemu Yera” no other information was mentioned in the minutes in relation to this project.<sup>44</sup> In summary, the revenues of 2016 and 2017 that were recorded in the ledger were 169 159 499 BIF while the expenditures were BIF 236 374 252.77 with a difference of BIF 67 214 753.77 which was financed by the Union’s operations in 2016 and 2017 for this project.<sup>45</sup>

When the questions were put to him, the secretary explained that the funds had primarily been handled by the (now former) treasurer, Biratevye, who had withdrawn the amount in cash from the division accounts, exchanged it into the local currency, and banked it in the church accounts. He explained to the auditors that from the inception, the project had faced challenges including an occasion when the president made a request to use part of the funds to purchase a new vehicle for his personal use. The secretary declined, stating that he would see to it that the funds were only used for the intended purpose. When the writer asked Ndikubwayo about this, he stated that he had only asked that part of the money be used to purchase a vehicle for the office, not for his personal use. He said that some departments did not have a vehicle and a new one would be useful for the work.<sup>46</sup>

Secretary Irakoze also stated in his defense that there were many opportunities to misappropriate the funds even before they had hit the church accounts, but he had no incentive to do so then and even less thereafter. He stated that he co-signed the accounts and had to leave for AUA where he was pursuing his graduate studies. Speaking to this writer, the secretary wondered why the auditors seemed determined to impute wrongdoing on his part when in fact his conscience was clear, and he had not re-

ceived a single cent of the whole amount.

Ndikubwayo expressed shock when he had discovered that Irakoze was “heavily indebted” to the BUM. He told this writer that he discovered that Irakoze owed well over BIF 8,000,000 (about \$4,200) to the BUM. To this charge, Irakoze stated that all his entitlements were by virtue of his office, and expenses for official duties had been charged to his personal account by Treasurer Biratevye. He explained that one could not draw such amounts without a vote.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Removal of Treasurer Biratevye**

When the division removed the treasurer on April 30, 2018, the reasons it gave for doing so included the spiraling debt levels at the BUM and failure to deposit trust funds in ECD accounts in the required time. Although Biratevye regularized the financial position regarding the trust funds before he left, the damage was done. The move to dismiss him was quickly interpreted along ethnic lines, and only served to worsen the working relations between the president and the secretary.

The president protested the removal of the treasurer, claiming he was innocent and a victim of ethnic machinations. He denounced the newly appointed treasurer, Daniel Bavugubusa, saying that he had not been consulted first on the appointment. Two days later he was on hand to oversee the handover, but it would not be an easy ride for Bavugubusa who, at some point, suffered a severe beating, allegedly by members of the dreaded *Imboneza*.

Just before the handover to the new treasurer took place in May 2018, the outgoing treasurer, Léonard Biratevye is said to have forged division signatories and withdrawn BIF 70,000,000 (between US\$ 35,000 and 40,000) from the ECD accounts at the Banque de Crédit de Bujumbura (BCB). The money was transferred to his

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wife's account held in the same bank. The signatories of the ECD accounts held at the BCB are ECD officers. In this case, the letter had the signatures of the ECD treasurer, Jerome Habimana, and associate treasurer, Michael B. Caballero. The BCB received the letter on May 7, 2018 with instructions to transfer the funds to the account of Léa Ndayizeye (Mrs. Léonard Biratevye) at the same bank.<sup>48</sup> The instructions were put into effect immediately.

By the time this happened, Biratevye had already been removed as treasurer just one week earlier, on April 30. It appears the bank had not yet been notified of the change in treasurers. Rather than send him packing, the ECD gave him a soft landing and he was assigned other duties within the BUM. Being an IT specialist, it was thought he could still be of service to the church and so he retained his staff housing and was only given new responsibilities. He handed over to the new treasurer, Daniel Bavugubusa on May 15, 2018. Prior to the handover, he is suspected of having made alterations in the central computer server, rendering it unworkable. The new treasurer discovered that the server was corrupted and there was only one person who had the capability to do this. When he was contacted to come around and work on it, he flatly declined to cooperate. Haggai Abuto, a Kenyan working with the ECD, was sent over to check on the server.

When Abuto arrived, he requested Biratevye to assist him, but he refused to cooperate. He was still living in a house rented for him by the BUM and was still drawing a salary. On August 22, 2018, Irakoze wrote to him asking him why he should be paid a salary and housed if he was not willing to offer his services to the church.<sup>49</sup> He never responded but instead sent a letter to the ECD complaining about harassment by the secretary. It is interesting to note that as late as August 2018, he continued to draw a salary from the church, a good three months after the BCB heist.

Biratevye was eventually terminated from his position when his role in the transfer of funds came to light. The move only served to escalate the crisis.

### **The Ndikubwayo Administration and the Establishment of the *Imboneza***

One day in 2016, shortly after he had assumed office, the secretary received in his office Élisée Manirakiza, the pastor of Kamenge District in Bujumbura. He reported

## CHARACTERS

**Lamec Barishinga** – imprisoned current president of the Burundi Union Mission

**Joseph Ndikubwayo** – president of the Burundi Union Mission chosen in 2015 by the East Central Africa Division. Although the ECD replaced him in 2018, he continues to function as president.

**Paul Irakoze** – secretary of the Burundi Union Mission

**Leonard Biratevye** – treasurer of the Burundi Union Mission, accused of financial irregularities and removed from office in April, 2018

**Daniel Bavugubusa** – Burundi Union Mission treasurer named to replace Biratevye

**Blasious M. Ruguri** – president of the East Central Africa Division

**Alain G. Coralie** – secretary of the East Central Africa Division

**Jerome Habimana** – treasurer of the East Central Africa Division

**D. E. Delhove** – first Adventist missionary to Burundi

**Maxine Duploux** – French missionary who ran the Bugunda mission for a period, also served as secretary and treasurer of the Ruandi-Urundi

**Silas Senkomo** – veteran Adventist pastor and translator of Adventist literature into Kirundi, former president (1987-1994) of the Burundi Mission, and father of Joseph Ndikubwayo

**Pierre Nkurunziza** – president of Burundi

**Sylvestre Mvutse** – an Adventist, governor of Cibitoke province, heartland of the Adventist Church. (He is married to the daughter of the late Union President Senkomo.)

**Lambert Ntiguma** – president of Southwest Burundi Field

**Eric Steven Nsengiyumva** – grandson of the first Burundian pastor, BUM Evangelism and Communication director who oversaw the TMI Campaign, named to replace Ntiguma as president of the Southwest Burundi Field

to him that President Ndikubwayo had visited his district and had met with a group of individuals of questionable character, forming a group called *Imboneza*. This group, said to be led by one Simbare Aloise, was meant to intimidate those opposed to Ndikubwayo. During the escalation of the differences with the president, the secretary was confronted in his office by a man named Bukuru said to be allied to the *Imboneza* and who warned him saying, “If you don’t work with the union president, *we will work on you.*” He was taken aback by the open threat coming from a clandestine group said to be closely allied to the president. When this writer asked Ndikubwayo about the existence of *Imboneza*, he categorically denied any knowledge of the group.<sup>50</sup> Incidents blamed on the group were to escalate the crisis in the months that followed.

At the start of the Ndikubwayo administration, a series of meetings were held involving former church officials and senior church members to discuss the crisis in the church. The meetings were sanctioned by ECD President Blasius Ruguri, who personally asked Ndikubwayo to clean up the issues in the BUM. Just after the departure of Treasurer Léonard Biratevye, there were many documents and letters being sent back and forth discussing the problems in the church in Burundi. Most of these letters, written by anonymous individuals, were exchanged on social media and reached the highest echelons of the church. The letters were forwarded depending on whoever the sender supported or whatever position they wanted to advance. One such letter was written by one Philippe Ndagijimana, thanking the division for the action to remove Biratevye, while another, by one Alexandre Niyonkuru, condemned the action by the division. On June 15, 2018, President Ndikubwayo called for a meeting to discuss the letters just a month after the new treasurer had taken office. It so happened that at that time, Secretary Irakoze was absent, away at the AUA.

It was the letter by Niyonkuru, whom nobody seemed to know, that raised most alarm. He accused Irakoze and Lambert Ntiguma (former BUM secretary and now presi-

dent of the South West Burundi Field) of being behind the removal of Biratevye. The ethnic dimension introduced by Niyonkuru was obviously designed to ignite ethnic passions against the two persons, both Tutsi. Niyonkuru even roped in Jerome Habimana at the division in a manner as to make it look like a Tutsi conspiracy and widening the scope to include Rwanda, Burundi’s perennial rival.

During the meeting, President Ndikubwayo read out the letter which accused Ntiguma (who was present at the meeting) of looking for the files of Burundian Hutu students when he was a student in Baraton “between the year 2000 and 2004.” Well, Ntiguma graduated from Baraton in 1997, so Niyonkuru got his facts wrong. But the point was made. Placing Ntiguma on the spot seemed

to advance the point that he was not to be trusted. His tenure as BUM executive secretary had witnessed divisions in the church and issues had arisen surrounding him in 2000. During that time, he served as the Communication and Trust Services director while Ndikubwayo was the Education director. So, they knew each other very well.<sup>51</sup>

Yet another letter, written by Ndagijimana, seemed to sug-

gest that Niyonkuru was in fact Ndikubwayo himself disguised as a frustrated church member, and it was not clear whether the said Ndagijimana was only adding another twist to the game. But when this writer asked Ndikubwayo whether he was Niyonkuru, he categorically denied it.

Whatever the identity of the letter writers, one can only imagine the discomfiture visited upon Ntiguma in a meeting where such toxic cross-ethnic charges were being leveled against him. However, Ntiguma brought up a matter during the meeting where he accused President Ndikubwayo of physically assaulting three officers of his South-West Burundi Field (SWBF). Ndikubwayo declined to discuss the matter and called for an early adjournment giving the reason that he had a baptism to conduct at Rutovu the following day and he needed to leave.

Ndikubwayo called a follow-up meeting on July 30, 2018. Secretary Irakoze and the new treasurer, Bavugubusa, declined to attend citing lack of consultation. Irakoze

*The ethnic dimension  
introduced by Niyonkuru  
was obviously designed to  
ignite ethnic passions against  
the two persons, both Tutsi.*





"BUM President Pr Joseph Ndikubwayo joined members at SDA Kiriri Church." (SOURCE: Twitter @RemyBiva • Posted January 4, 2020)

stated that as executive secretary he should have been the one calling the meeting and setting the agenda. He also stated that the minutes of the previous meeting had not even been released ahead of this meeting, which he said was not according to procedure. Crucially, Ntiguma also refused to attend the meeting and so the ethnic card came into play.

The meeting took place anyway. Ndikubwayo, who interpreted the boycott by the three officers as a challenge to his authority, decided that the former BUM president, Uzziel Habingabwa, (now a retired pastor), the North Burundi Field president, Enoch Ntunzwenimana, and union departmental leader for Children's Ministries and Women's Ministries, Mrs. Louise Nzeyimana, should meet with Irakoze and Bavugubusa in their offices to find out why they were boycotting the meetings. Irakoze told them that he objected to the non-procedural way of calling the meetings and setting the agenda.

Meanwhile in the meeting itself, the matter of the

physical scuffle between the officers of the SWBF and the union president was discussed. Ndikubwayo stated that it was he who had in fact been assaulted because the officers of the SWBF had stood by him in a manner as to suggest that they would want to physically assault him. He played down the matter, but the officers involved had not attended the meeting, including the SWBF president, Ntiguma.

Another matter that came up was the issue of the BUM rented house. The accountant said that BUM Secretary Irakoze had told her that he had received a call from Switzerland Cooperation, an international NGO operating in Burundi which had rented the house, about the bank account number. The NGO had received a different bank account number from the official BUM accounts, and she told him that it was the treasurer (Birat-eve) who was responsible for issuing accounts.

A third meeting was called on August 6, 2018. Again, Irakoze and Bavugubusa failed to attend. Lambert Ntiguma attended for a few minutes but left in a huff. Ndikub-

wayo stated that Ntiguma accused him of working like an “Anglican Bishop,” without the other structures of the church (citing the absence of the secretary). According to Ntiguma, the GCAS report was tabled by Ndikubwayo just to paint Irakoze as a thief. He questioned why the president was discussing financial matters in the absence of the treasurer. Their absence was again interpreted as insubordination and their failure to attend would be interpreted to mean that they were behind the letters sent to the division to tarnish the name of the church in Burundi. One of the twelve resolutions voted for in that meeting was to request Irakoze to “reconsider his call to ministry and work accordingly.” A similar resolution was reached on Bavugubusa and Ntiguma. The meeting attendees also voted to “request that ECD leadership follow-up on the culture of leaders despising leaders.” This was in apparent reference to the trio that had not attended the meeting.

### Matters Implode

In August, Ndikubwayo sent summaries of the meetings to the ECD and complained that the two officers who failed to attend the meetings were undermining his authority. Irakoze also decided to write to the ECD to object to the “distorted report” and denounce the meetings as not having been called according to procedure. Two days after the last meeting, on August 8, 2018, Irakoze privately sent a draft of his letter to the ECD treasurer, Jerome Habimana, to see if it would be acceptable to the ECD. After reading it, Habimana wrote back to him stating that it was okay and made personal remarks in Kinyarwanda that were seemingly against Ndikubwayo. He accused Ndikubwayo of being bitter at the removal of Biratevye and for being “a politician.” He accidentally copied the letter to the ECD president, Dr. Blasius Ruguri, ECD Secretary Alain Coralie—and to President Ndikubwayo.<sup>52</sup>

The email deeply angered the subject of the discussion. Ndikubwayo wrote back to Ruguri stating that he had always said that his problems emanated from the ECD.<sup>53</sup> This became an issue of the perennial ethnic animosities between the Hutu and the Tutsi and the evidence was now in black and white. The age-old rivalries and accusations that the Rwandese were interfering with the work in Burundi now came to the fore. If nothing else, this unintended action (we can only assume as much) would end up being the straw that broke the camel’s back.

In response, Ruguri asked Ndikubwayo not to escalate the matter, hoping that it could be dealt with internally. He even promised to meet him on the sidelines at a meeting held in Rwanda with the GC leadership. That meeting did not take place. Information about the email was only revealed when the ECD decided to replace Ndikubwayo with Barishinga. In the ensuing crisis, Ndikubwayo used the email to affirm his position and to support his innocence. This then reduced the crisis to a Hutu-Tutsi rivalry: Jerome Habimana and Paul Irakoze on one side and Joseph Ndikubwayo and Leonard Biratevye on the other side.

### Ntiguma’s Altercation with Ndikubwayo

On October 26, 2018, Ndikubwayo called for a meeting of all the field officers to take an audit of all the books (*Intambuko kuyindi yo kuzuzwa Mpwemu Yera*) that were delivered to the field offices. Ntiguma attended the meeting as the president of the South West Burundi Field. During the meeting, Ntiguma could not hide his discomfort at the subject of discussion and also the fact that the secretary and treasurer were not in attendance. He told Ndikubwayo, “I wonder how you, alone are sitting in front while your colleagues cannot come.” Ntiguma walked away but not before telling Ndikubwayo that he would not finish his term. He said, “You used to talk about me and Pastor Jethron, but we, were able to finish out term, but you, will soon be removed.”<sup>54</sup>

Ndikubwayo did not take the words kindly and coming from an individual of another ethnic group only served to worsen the matter. Ndikubwayo and Ntiguma had not been friends for many years; their differences had seemed to grow exponentially when both were officers in the BUM. Ntiguma’s words would turn out to be prophetic.

### Removal of Ndikubwayo

Two days later, on October 28, 2018, Ndikubwayo, Irakoze, and Bavugubusa were all summoned to the division offices in Nairobi. They were given the chance to air their issues in separate meetings. Two days later, on October 30, 2018, Ndikubwayo was given the chance to explain himself at a meeting chaired by ECD President Blasius Ruguri. Present were ECD Secretary Alain Coralie and ECD Treasurer Jerome Habimana. Ndikubwayo was asked why he was leading a dysfunctional Secretar-

iat. He replied that he and Irakoze did not have a good working relationship, noting that Irakoze refused to attend the meetings he had called. He also pointed to the GCAS audit report stating that it had severely implicated Irakoze for colluding with Biratevye to steal church funds. Those privy to the meeting, who requested anonymity, say that Ndikubwayo was asked why he was working with a report that was clearly marked as “an Interim Audit” and not a final one. What would he do if the final one was released with information materially different findings from the interim audit? He was also asked why he was handling a document that was only meant for the ECD, the entity that had called for the audit and not him. He was unable to offer any credible explanations to the questions.

During the meeting, Ndikubwayo was also taken to task about the BIF 70,000,000 (about US\$37,000) which had been fraudulently removed from the division accounts at the BCB by Biratevye. The letter authorizing the transfer had been signed on May 7, 2018, the same day Ndikubwayo had written a letter to the ECD protesting the dismissal of Biratevye and refusing to sanction the handover to Bavugubusa. Ndikubwayo replied that he was not aware of the fraudulent transfer of the money by the former treasurer, Biratevye. He said that since he was not in any way a signatory to that account, he was not aware of any movement of funds in the account. The ECD officers also asked Ndikubwayo about his confrontational attitude with regard to some of the staff in the BUM.


Another accusation against Ndikubwayo was that he sat on the National Security Council (Conseil National de

Securité), a government position, while at the same time he held an ecclesiastical office. He was appointed to the largely advisory position by President Pierre Nkurunziza in 2015. When asked by this writer about this, Ndikubwayo stated that on a trip to Kenya in 2015, he received a call from the Burundian presidency stating that he had been appointed a member of the CNS. On arrival at the division in Nairobi, he informed President Ruguri that he had been appointed to the organization. Ruguri congratulated him for it, as did the GC president, Ted N.C. Wilson, when he heard about it. They said that the church would receive favor in the eye of the government of Burundi. The CNS met once every three months and he was not paid for that.<sup>55</sup>

Those opposed to Ndikubwayo said that he could not hold a government position while serving as a senior official of the church even if that role was only advisory and unpaid. The question arose that if the ECD and the GC were aware of it, why had they not acted sooner in removing him?

After the meeting with the ECD officers, Ndikubwayo asked if they could have a joint meeting with Irakoze and Bavugubusa. This was not to be. It appears that the decision to remove Ndikubwayo from the position of union president had already been made. He was privately approached by Secretary Coralie and the GC associate secretary, John H. Thomas, who asked him if he would consider resigning. He declined, stating that he did not see a good reason why he should.<sup>57</sup>

The following week, on November 6, 2018, a full ses-



## BURUNDI UNION MISSION

Organized 1931; reorganized 1960, 1964, 1984, 2002, 2012, 2018

**TERRITORY:** Burundi; comprising the East Burundi, North Burundi, North-West Burundi, and South-West Burundi Fields

**STATISTICS** (June 30, 2018): Churches, 451; membership, 160,594; population, 11,845,000 (online statistics)

SOURCE: <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13597>





Joseph Ndikubwayo and family (left); Lamec Barishinga and family (right). (SOURCE: Facebook Profiles Photos)

sion of the ECD Executive Committee met. Ndikubwayo, a committee member by virtue of his office, was not given the chance to defend his position. The Committee voted to replace him with immediate effect.<sup>58</sup>

### A Botched Transition

To replace Ndikubwayo, the ECD Committee appointed Lamec Barishinga, a native of Bujumbura Rural, who had trained at the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) in Mudende, Rwanda where he obtained an education degree. He also studied at University of Eastern Africa Baraton where he obtained an MEd. He was ordained in 2002, on the same day as Joseph Ndikubwayo and Lambert Ntiguma. While they were kindred in calling, they couldn't be further in ideology.

To oversee the handover, the ECD sent Associate Secretary Tom A. Ogal and Assistant Treasurer Dan Agwena, both of them Kenyans, to Bujumbura. Ndikubwayo was on the same flight. News of the removal of Ndikubwayo had already made it to Bujumbura and when they landed they met a hostile environment on the ground. In the airport they were met by church members, including the newly appointed President Barishinga.<sup>59</sup>

They went to the BUM offices where an advance

party had come to meet them. Some of those who had come were said to be members of the *Imboneza*. The ECD representatives Ogal and Agwena convened the union staff and the departmental directors. Perhaps sensing the tension, they did not state the reasons behind the removal of Ndikubwayo and declined to answer any questions but promised that in two weeks other officials would come from the ECD to formally announce what had happened. They went to Ndikubwayo's office to oversee the handover but he requested more time saying he would be ready on Friday.

Ogal and Agwena did not expect Ndikubwayo would cause any trouble and assumed the handover would happen on Friday as he had promised. They returned on the evening flight back to Nairobi. Barishinga agreed to wait until Friday for the handover. It was not to be.

When the plane carrying the ECD officers took to the skies, the situation in Burundi began to unravel, beyond what anyone had anticipated. Some individuals allied with Ndikubwayo quickly wrote to the government to stop Barishinga's assumption of office. The legal structure in Burundi is such that any leader of any organization must first receive recognition by the government. Due to years of instability, one cannot make such changes affecting the

population without the knowledge and approval of the government. The Interior Minister must sign a letter of approval for any such official to be recognized by the government and to operate legally.

On November 8, 2018, Secretary Irakoze wrote to the Minister for the Interior, Pascal Barandagiye, to inform him that Barishinga was the new union president. By the time the letter reached him, the protest letter by those opposed to the removal of Ndikubwayo had already reached him. The Interior Minister responded on November 29, 2018 stating that Ndikubwayo was elected for five years and had been removed after just three years without grounds. He stated that he considered his removal was illegal.

### **Ndikubwayo Fights Back**

The ECD had probably not anticipated Ndikubwayo's capacity to fight back. He argued that he had been unfairly treated by the division committee which had voted for his removal "without a reason." He placed his predicament squarely on the workings of Paul Irakoze and Jerome Habimana at the division who had profiled him behind his back. He used Habimana's email as his evidence. The argument soon changed to the impending ECD elections of 2020 and the speculation that a Rwandese was eyeing the presidency of the ECD and so he (Ndikubwayo) had to be removed because he was perceived to be against such a candidacy. While it was not clear which Rwandese he was referring to, the mere mention of a Rwandese being the effective leader of the eleven-nation region, including Burundi, was enough to make his case.

Ndikubwayo was able to convince the authorities in Burundi that Jerome Habimana, being a Rwandese Tutsi, sitting in the ECD Committee, was against him only because of his ethnicity. Although Jerome sits on the committee, he has only one vote out of thirty-one and the other members could easily overrule his interest if he had one. Of course, Ndikubwayo also sat on the same committee. Exploiting the traditional suspicions of Rwanda, Ndikubwayo successfully made his case with the authorities who interpreted the actions of the ECD Committee (which is made up of foreign nationals), as interference in the internal affairs of Burundi. The Burundi authorities now refused to recognize his replacement, Barishinga.

Ndikubwayo had only served three of his five years in office and as such he made the point that it was unfair to remove him when he was not yet done with his term. According to Ndikubwayo, the law in Burundi prohibited the removal of the head of a non-profit before the end of their term. This made a strong argument for him because the Burundian president, Nkurunziza at that time, was embroiled in a dispute about the limitation of his term of office.

### **A Fractured Church**

The church was now properly divided between church members supporting Ndikubwayo and others supporting Barishinga. The government backed Ndikubwayo, while Barishinga had the ECD/GC defending him. To back up his claims of injustice, Ndikubwayo had the GCAS Interim Audit report which did not accuse him of any wrongdoing, but which instead accused both Irakoze and Biratevye of financial impropriety, but for which only Biratevye had been fired. These were, in Ndikubwayo's thinking, serious injustices. The argument now took the dimension that Irakoze could not be fired because he was working closely with fellow Tutsi, Jerome Habimana, to foster a Rwandan interest in Burundi. It was easy for Ndikubwayo to make the case that he had been unjustly treated.

In addition, Ndikubwayo also had with him the written confession of deposed treasurer Biratevye, stating that he (Biratevye) had shared the stolen funds with Irakoze and even enumerating the amounts. When asked by this writer about this specific allegation, Irakoze categorically denied having received any money from Biratevye. He suspected that Biratevye had been pressured by Ndikubwayo to implicate him.<sup>60</sup> He stated that during the interview with the auditors, Biratevye had implicated him, but the new treasurer, Daniel Bavugubusa, strongly objected to it, arguing that Irakoze being the whistleblower, could not have reported the problem if he knew he too was dirty.<sup>61</sup>

### **Irakoze Arrested**

It was on the basis of the documents provided by Ndikubwayo that individuals allied to him filed a case at the anti-corruption court. They also wrote to the Interior ministry and the *Organe de Régulation et de Conciliation des Confessions Religieuses* demanding the immediate arrest of



After three weeks, Irakoze was presented to a judge at the Mukaza court but the case had changed. Instead of being accused of stealing church funds, he was accused of “atteinte à la sûreté intérieure et extérieure” (undermining internal and external security).

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Irakoze on charges of corruption and abuse of office. They went to court under a certificate of urgency on Thursday, November 8, and Irakoze was arrested on Monday, November 12, 2018, the day Irakoze had called together the executive committee to install Barishinga. As Irakoze sat in his office waiting for the meeting to start, Ndikubwayo entered his office with five police officers and pointed them to Irakoze. He was arrested just before the meeting could take place and it was consequently called off.

Irakoze was taken into custody in what would be a five-month stint in prison.

Initially, he was marched to the BSR (*Bureau Spécial du Recherche* or Special Bureau for Investigation) a special section of the police force where he was kept for two days. The ECD acted fast and sent a letter to the authorities stating that the Anti-Corruption Authority could not act on an interim audit report and that Irakoze should be discharged pending the release of the final audit report. On receiving the letter, the Anti-Corruption Authority realized that Irakoze had not misappropriated public funds and so released him into the civil courts. Here, Prosecutor Thacien took up his case. Instead of presenting him to a judge, he sent him to the Central Prison at Mpimba.

Two other church officials were also arrested on November 12, Ntiguma and Fidelite Niyomubutazi, an accountant at the union. All three are Tutsi, illustrating the ethnic dimension of the crisis. Some church members (majority Hutu) came to their defense pleading their innocence. From their intervention, Fidelite was later released because she was the mother of young children, but Ntiguma was kept in police custody for a night and released the following day. Irakoze remained in prison.

After three weeks, Irakoze was presented to a judge at the Mukaza court but the case had changed. Instead of

being accused of stealing church funds, he was accused of “atteinte à la sûreté intérieure et extérieure” (undermining internal and external security). He was basically being accused of being a spy—for Rwanda.<sup>62</sup> They said he wanted to give BFI 800,000,000 (US\$ 428,000) to Rwanda-based Burundian rebels. He faced a jail-term of up to thirty-two years.

### **ECD Officers Arrive to Testify for Irakoze**

The lawyers in charge of the case requested that the ECD send officers to testify for Irakoze. Tom Ogal and Dan Agwena were sent to testify and to try to secure the release of Irakoze. On December 12, 2018, they arrived on the first flight to Bujumbura and went to their hotel to await the meeting with Irakoze’s lawyer. The lawyer had gone to court and stayed longer than he had expected. He arrived at 2 p.m. and it was difficult to go to court thereafter, so they secured another appointment for the following day and rescheduled their evening flight.

The following morning, they were in court and gave their testimony, which was translated into French. As soon as they finished, they received word that they had been accused of being Rwandan spies who had come to bribe the judges to release Irakoze. Knowing they were in danger, they made their way to the airport to see if they could immediately fly back to Kenya. But they could not get an immediate flight out of the country. While they chose to await a 6 p.m. flight, it was then only midday. They felt insecure sitting out the six hours ahead of them. Fearing that security agents could pounce on them at any moment, they left the airport for their hotel to plan their escape, possibly by road through Tanzania.<sup>63</sup> Their Burundian associate made frantic calls to find out what was happening and they informed the ECD in Nairobi about the sudden

turn of events. The ECD officials in Nairobi acted fast and contacted the Kenyan Embassy in Bujumbura, requesting them to secure the safety of the two officers. The Embassy in turn reached the Burundi Government which gave the assurance that they would not be harmed. They returned to Nairobi on the evening flight.

It later emerged that the *Imboneza* may have been behind the messages.

### Irakoze Fails to Secure His Freedom

Back in court, the prosecutor Thacien told the judge that Irakoze had an Australian visa and was a flight risk. The judge agreed with him and kept Irakoze in prison indefinitely. Later, Irakoze learned word had gone around that he held a Rwandese passport and had, using that passport, travelled to Australia. Irakoze showed this writer a copy of his Burundian passport and the Australian visa in it. The charges made things worse for him. He was sent back to the Central Prison of Mpimba, where 4,800 male inmates and 300 female inmates are housed in a space designed for about 800 people. Dangerously congested, violence, drugs, delinquency, and disease were the norm at Mpimba.

Doubtless, being incarcerated in Mpimba represented a difficult position for Paul Irakoze, who had never been in jail before, but like his Biblical namesake, he chose to spend his prison time doing God's work. He conducted Bible studies and organized an evangelistic campaign attended by a quarter of the prison population. Many joined regular Bible study classes. A baptism followed and forty-seven people were brought to the Adventist faith.<sup>64</sup>

### Intervention by the Adventist Women and Men Organization

On January 3, 2019, the Adventist Women and Men Organization (AWMO) wrote to President Ruguri at the ECD pleading for his intervention. Witnessing how the

church was so deeply divided and the senior official Irakoze remained in prison, the AWMO pleaded with Ruguri to restore "unity, tranquility and cohesion in the church" without which they could not achieve their mission.<sup>65</sup> The AWMO stated that they had written to various banking institutions that held church accounts notifying them that the officials of the church had been changed, thwarting attempts by Ndikubwayo to access the funds. It is not clear whether they were successful; however, Ndikubwayo was able to obtain a letter from the Interior Minister Barandagiye overturning any attempts to bar him from accessing the church funds.

According to an AWMO document, they had organized and sponsored a prayer meeting at the North-West Burundi Field to seek unity among church members and "to issue directives to members on how to behave in times such as this including not allowing Pastor Joseph (Ndikubwayo) to address church members anymore."

AWMO also began a campaign to denounce Ndikubwayo and collected 12,410 signatures from across the country that they submitted to the president of Burundi, Nkurunziza, and to the first and second deputy presidents, the Interior Minister, Barandagiye, the Administrator General of the National Intelligence Service, and the Secretary General of the National Security Council. They attached the church's *Working Policy* on how leaders are appointed and some of the actions by Ndikubwayo that had caused his ouster. According to the AWMO letter, the government had chosen to

listen to a former BUM president who, apparently, was allied to Ndikubwayo, thereby complicating the situation. The AWMO then requested a high-level intervention session by the church to meet with the government officials in a bid to unlock the stalemate.

In yet another petition to the Interior Minister, the AWMO cited certain "regrettable actions" by Ndikub-

*Doubtless, being incarcerated in Mpimba represented a difficult position for Paul Irakoze, who had never been in jail before, but like his Biblical namesake, he chose to spend his prison time doing God's work.*

wayo saying that on November 25, 2018, Ndikubwayo authorized one of his guards to attack and beat up the BUM treasurer, Daniel Bavugubusa.<sup>66</sup> This action was said to have been carried out by the *Imboneza*. The AWMO also said that on December 13, 2018, accompanied by hired goons (read *Imboneza*), Ndikubwayo “smashed all the doors of the office of the Adventist Church Mission in Bujumbura and began robbing the Mission’s funds.”<sup>67</sup>

The letter, signed by Evariste Sindayigaya (vice president), Johnson Nikobiri (secretary general), Marc Niyikiza (treasurer) and Floride Buyoyi (assistant treasurer) concluded:

You would understand, Excellency Minister, that your decision to keep this Pastor as President and Legal Representative of the Adventist Church, while the hierarchical authorities of the Adventist Church have removed him, will not miss adverse consequences on all levels. Considering that Burundians are fervent believers in general and Adventists in particular, in the foregoing, we would like to ask you to consider and restore the necessary value to the text that governs the Seventh-day Adventist Church... As for us, we reaffirm our commitment to respect the law and the Constitution of Burundi which gives us freedom of worship.<sup>68</sup>

The government maintained its position.

### Ndikubwayo’s Explanation

On January 4, 2019, Ndikubwayo wrote an eight-page document analyzing the development of the crisis from the moment he was fired onwards. He identified the letter writer Ndagijimana as being Evariste Sindayigaya (the AWMO vice president) but did not disclose the identity of Alexandre Niyonkuru. He then outlined the cause of the crisis, pegging it squarely on the circumstances related to his removal from office. He protested his removal as an unfair dismissal without any reason while Irakoze, whom he insisted had stolen the money with Biratevyé, was allowed to remain.<sup>69</sup> He also protested the appointment of Barishinga, claiming that his wife Sifa Esther (Mrs. Lamec Barishinga), who served as the BUM cashier, had been an accomplice in the theft “by allowing for five times the

embezzled funds to transit through her bank account.”<sup>70</sup>

He suggested that as a way forward, the ECD should remove Barishinga with immediate effect. He also demanded that the GC send a fact-finding mission to Burundi and stated that the relationship with the government of Burundi be safeguarded. He also demanded that the ECD Treasury leadership (he did not name Jerome Habimana) immediately release the funds for the proposed Burundi Adventist Hospital which he said had been withheld since 2010. He also demanded the immediate replacement of Irakoze.

Finally, he demanded that the ECD leadership, which had refused to recognize his administration, should transfer the BUM to another division or have it attached to the GC directly. The ECD did not act on his letter but instead instituted a series of actions to wrest control of the church from Ndikubwayo.

### The ECD Intervention

As things took a downward spiral, the ECD wrote to the BUM Executive Committee to explain the reasons for the removal of Ndikubwayo, because Ndikubwayo insisted that he was innocent since there was no document that had outlined the reasons for his removal. The ECD secretary, Alain Coralie, decided to clear matters. In a letter dated January 15, 2019, Coralie explained the reason for the removal of Ndikubwayo in accordance with *Working Policy* B45 20:

Here are the points which constituted the argument of gross negligence which were at the basis of the dismissal of Pastor Joseph Ndikubwayo as president of the Union of Burundi:

- Lack of collaboration with his fellow administrators, contrary to the *Working Policy* Article XI despite the many warnings by the administrators of the higher organization.
- Unilateral decision-making contrary to the *Working Policy* of the Adventist Church which pronounces that decision-making must be agreed by the three administrators (President, Executive Secretary, Treasurer). See *Working Policy* B45. There are numerous examples: the attempt to dismiss the four administrators of Lycée Maranatha de Kivoga; an attempt to

implant the Adventist University in Kivoga Primary School classrooms.

- Quarrels in public with fellow administrators and other failings of pastoral ethics.
- Lack of follow-up and lack of professional ethics when handing over and taking over the new and former Treasurer of the Union which led to the seizure of 70,000,000 BIF from the accounts of the BCB.<sup>71</sup>

The belated letter was too long in coming. By this time, Ndikubwayo was no longer working with the ECD-recognized BUM Executive Committee, but rather with the ones he had chosen. He had replaced some of the pastors with those allied to him and even dismissed some of the field presidents that had failed to recognize him. So, in short, there was no one to implement Coralie's letter, and even if there had been, they were not inclined to obey him. With hindsight, this letter should have been released on the same day Ndikubwayo had been ousted and issued to accompany the ECD officers who had been sent to install Barishinga. Ndikubwayo continued as though nothing had happened.

### Ndikubwayo's Defense

Separately, Ndikubwayo disputed the grounds for his removal. With regard to the issue of the 70,000,000 BIF, he stated that he was not a signatory to that account and wondered why he would be held responsible for the transactions of an account to which he had no access. He said the signatories of that account should have been held responsible for the loss of the money since they should have acted sooner, or at least notified him about it.<sup>72</sup>

Defending his administration, Ndikubwayo noted

he had presided over what was billed as one of the most successful TMI (Total Member Involvement) Evangelism programs in which 44,000 new members were baptized in Burundi in 2018 alone. This increased the membership by 25% in that short window. His administration had also given a greater visibility to the Adventist youth—the Pathfinders marching during national days had impressed many. They had even attracted the attention of the Burundian government and President Nkurunziza (who is a very religious man) was very impressed with them. During his administration, there had also been an unprecedented growth in income.

However, for some reason, the growth of income had not quite improved the financial position of the union mission which continued to grapple with significantly high debt levels, a situation that had also contributed to Biratweye's ouster.

### The GC Intervention

In the period between March 7 and 9, 2019, Dr. Gagnoune Diop, the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Affairs director, went to Burundi to try and sort out the situation. He met with Interior Minister Pascal Barandagiye and with the *Organe de Régulation et de Conciliation des Confessions Religieuses (ORCCR)*. The minister reportedly told the GC team, which included Alain Coralie (ECD secretary), that it would be in the best interest of the Adventist Church to replace both Ndikubwayo and Barishinga with a neutral third person. This was also the position of the ORCCR.

After the meetings, Diop wrote a letter stating that the General Conference did not see a reason to remove a duly elected church official (referring to Barishinga). He then named the treasurer, Daniel Bavugubusa, as the le-

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Ndikubwayo was no longer working with the ECD-recognized BUM Executive Committee, but rather with the ones he had chosen. He had replaced some of the pastors with those allied to him and even dismissed some of the field presidents that had failed to recognize him.

gal representative of the church in Burundi. A native of Kayanza, Bavugubusa was educated in Bujumbura at the University of Burundi where he obtained a diploma in commerce and at the University of Bugema (2006–2009) where he obtained a BBA in accounting. Diop accidentally identified Bavugubusa as a “pastor” but he was actually an accountant by profession.

Those allied to Ndikubwayo immediately identified the mistake and convinced the Interior Minister that it was further evidence that the General Conference could not be trusted. They also stated that the positions of legal representative and union president could not be separated quoting the *Church Manual* as their evidence.

This position angered the Interior Minister who now stated that he would not recognize Barishinga but would only recognize Ndikubwayo. Ganoune Diop fired back a letter dated March 26, 2019, stating that he would report what he termed as Burundi’s violation of religious liberty to the Africa Union, United Nations, the European Union, and the World Bank. This only served to further anger Burundi, a nation which at that time was grappling with international criticism on the issue of the presidential term limits, crackdowns on dissent, and other human rights violations.

While in Burundi, Diop also met a senior military officer who was friendly to Adventists, having grown up in the Adventist church. The officer was a member of the National Security Council which is chaired by Burundi President Nkurunziza. This is also the body of which Ndikubwayo is a member. The officer promised to lobby the government on behalf of Barishinga. Interestingly, this senior officer was relieved of his job at the CNS early in November 2019<sup>73</sup> and was later redeployed. By then, Ndikubwayo had already been removed from his membership in the National Security Council.

## Irakoze Released and Situation Worsens

Irakoze successfully appealed his case at the Court of Appeal, and was released with the condition that he not leave Bujumbura. His passport was withheld. He walked out of Mpimba on April 3, 2019 after nearly five months in jail.

The failure by the Burundi Government to recognize Barishinga created a serious power vacuum in the church. Factions loyal to either side regularly disrupted the meetings of the other causing, in some cases, the intervention of the police. Gihosha SDA Church witnessed sectarian skirmishes and videos of police beating up members allied to one of the factions were widely circulated on social media. At Kamenge SDA Church, Communion was

disrupted by factions allied to the opposing sides. The *Imbonanza* were said to have been behind the chaos witnessed in the church. Various other churches’ services continued normally but many Adventists chose to remain at home altogether, fearing getting caught in the wrong place.

On May 4, 2019, worshippers at Jabe SDA Church in Bujumbura saw skirmishes when busloads of people disrupted worship and attacked the pastor for allegedly supporting Ndikubwayo. Police were called and running battles were witnessed in the church. A few days later, Barishinga and Ntiguma were arrested because of that and were released on a bond for good conduct. Police thereafter were

placed on high alert on Sabbaths and kept watch on Adventist facilities just in case there was violence.

On July 7, 2019 the Rusenyi SDA Church in Muyinga province witnessed skirmishes in which a police officer was injured. Shots were fired in the air. Later that month, on July 27, Buganda Mission in Cibitoke also witnessed running battles with the police. The vehicle belonging to the commune administrator was damaged. On September 21, 2019 Ngozi SDA Church witnessed battles with

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the police and on October 12, at Musenyi SDA Church, a similar situation unfolded with their youth led by Alfred Miharurwa.

At Muramvya Province, the governor, Laurent Nicimbeshe, issued a decree suspending the operations of the Adventist Church until the wrangling parties found a solution. He had met with them twice but failed to find consensus. The bone of contention was the appointment and deployment of Elie Manirambona on October 5, 2019, by the faction associated with Ndikubwayo. The church congregants rejected the new pastor stating that they did not recognize actions by Ndikubwayo, despite the fact that Ndikubwayo controlled church accounts and funds. Ndikubwayo did manage to get the Muramvya governor to suspend his decree. But that was not the end of the violence.

### A Road to Nowhere

At the time of Ndikubwayo's removal as president, the ECD wrote to freeze the union's bank accounts. However, he was able to obtain a letter from the Interior Minister Barandagiye to unfreeze the accounts. Then he appointed new field presidents loyal to him, but the ECD countered by withdrawing their pastoral credentials.

On 15 April 2019, Barishinga lead a team to meet with the government ombudsman tasked with hearing complaints against the government. Barishinga complained that Interior Minister Barandagiye was seeking to impose a leader on the Adventist Church by failing to recognize Barishinga's appointment. Then he met with journalists from local and international media, including the VOA and BBC. This action angered the government. It was assumed to be the implementation of Ganoune Diop's plan to shame the government with the international community. The ombudsman asked them to meet for another hearing on April 18. The day before, on April 17, Interior Minister Barandagiye wrote to GC President Wilson stating that the insistence that Barishinga be the union president, was "a contradiction to the discussions we had with your delegation."

### Government Intervention

To mediate the situation, Minister Barandagiye invited both Barishinga and Ndikubwayo to a meeting at the Hotel Source du Nil in Bujumbura the following day,



### ABOUT THE EAST-CENTRAL AFRICA DIVISION

The East-Central Africa Division is comprised of 11 countries. Amid a population of about 307 million, the Seventh-day Adventist Church counts more than 2.5 million members worshipping at more than 11,000 churches.

This division is home to the Adventist University of Africa in Kenya, which provides theological training to pastors across the continent. It also operates several other universities and many secondary schools.

The church in Rwanda has more than half a million members and is well regarded in the community. Rwandans are required to perform community service for basic country development on the last Saturday of each month, but the government allows Adventists to perform these duties on Sunday instead to accommodate Sabbath-observance.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency has major operations throughout the division.

Kenyan long-distance runner Abel Kirui, an Adventist church member, won the silver medal in the men's marathon at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

SOURCE: <https://www.adventist.org/church/world-church/east-central-africa/>

when the Barishinga team was scheduled to meet with the ombudsman. Instead of going to the Minister's meeting, Barishinga chose to attend the meeting with the ombudsman. The ombudsman decided that he could not go ahead with the meeting when in fact Minister Barandagiye was trying to bring the two factions together. He directed them



"The president and legal representative of the BUM Pr Joseph Ndirakobuca." (SOURCE: Twitter @RemyBiva • Posted December 28, 2019)

to attend the meeting with the Minister. Barishinga declined, giving the reason that he had not been cleared by the ECD to attend that meeting.

The meeting took place anyway, with Ndirakobuca in attendance. Minister Pascal Barandagiye explained that Diop had gone against what had been agreed upon, which was to remove both Barishinga and Ndirakobuca and install someone else. Ndirakobuca probably should have at least explained to the Minister that it was difficult, unless under exceptional circumstances, for the GC to overturn decisions of the ECD Committee. Minister Barandagiye then declared that Ndirakobuca would have to continue in the position now that the GC had reneged on the earlier agreement. As a lawyer, and formerly the Justice Minister, Barandagiye stated that the law had to be followed in the matter and that anyone disagreeing with him could go to

court to challenge his decision. He called for the church to hold fresh elections (which was not actionable because the status of Burundi Union Mission did not allow that). Only a union conference that has a constituency can do that. Under *Working Policy*, any change in a union mission presidency would have to be made by the same the ECD Committee.

### **ECD and the Kenyan Crisis**

About this time, the crisis in the Central Kenya Conference (CKC) was unfolding. Church members there who were unsatisfied with the church elections at the CKC, had created a new unsanctioned Nairobi Cosmopolitan Conference (NCC) to rival the CKC. The pro-Ndirakobuca group in Burundi quickly pointed to the crisis in Kenya stating that the ECD had failed to resolve a local

matter and that the stand-off in Burundi was yet another illustration that the ECD was incapable of being a neutral arbiter.

Meanwhile, Ndikubwayo was operating the church like there was no issue at hand. He began making key personnel changes, removing field presidents, starting with Ntiguma. He also transferred pastors allied to Barishinga and installed new pastors in congregations he felt were against him.

To contain the worsening situation, in March 2019, the ECD Committee decided to revoke the credentials of key pastors who refused to recognize its decision to install Barishinga as BUM president.

Four pastors, Eric Steven Nsengiyumva, Benjamin Bidandaza, Nyandwi Elie, and Pascal Ntirandekura had their credentials revoked. According to the official communication, they had continued to resist church policy and the ECD's orders to recognize Lamec Barishinga. They were removed by the BUM Executive Committee, a decision then ratified by the division. In April 2019, Ndikubwayo's credentials were also revoked.

Prior to the credential removal, Nsengiyumva had been appointed by Ndikubwayo to take over from Ntiguma as president of the South-West Burundi Field in December 2018.<sup>74</sup> (It was seen as Ndikubwayo getting back at Ntiguma over their longstanding rivalry.) Nsengiyumva is a third-generation Adventist, the grandson of Kaduha, the very first Burundian to be ordained a minister. Earlier in 2018, Nsengiyumva had distinguished himself while serving as the BUM Communication director and evangelism coordinator by conducting a very successful TMI (Total Member Involvement) Evangelistic campaign. By engaging all the Burundi members to bring friends to the campaign, some 44,000 new members were added to the church roles, swelling the union's membership by an unprecedented 25%.

Another of the pastors, Benjamin Bidandaza, had served as the president of the East Burundi Field while Elie Nyandwi was the BUM departmental director for Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, Education, and Youth Ministries.<sup>75</sup> Nyandwi was appointed president of the North West Burundi Field by Ndikubwayo. He also appointed Pascal Ntirandekura president of the North Burundi Field in what was clearly a reward for loyalty to him. Nyandwi and Bidandaza were doctoral students at the AUA. When

their credentials were removed, their student scholarships were also terminated.

## The ADRA Burundi Debacle

After the problems in the Burundi Union Mission started, the next frontier in the battle to control the church opened at ADRA Burundi. The country director, Joel Ngba, a missionary from Cameroon, faced a serious dilemma: to work with a church leader appointed by the ECD but not recognized by the government, or to work with the one removed by the ECD but recognized by the government of Burundi.<sup>76</sup> Ngba believed that ADRA Burundi's interests as a humanitarian organization would best be served by staying neutral and refraining from getting involved in the leadership crisis. He refused to attend meetings called by either Ndikubwayo or Barishinga, stating that he needed a clear position from the ECD or GC on the leadership in Burundi.

This position did not sit well with either side of the divide. But Ngba was in a difficult spot, not wanting to rub the government the wrong way, given its sensitivities with international NGOs. In fact, all international NGOs had already been suspended from operating in Burundi in October 2018 by the government, including ADRA Burundi. At the start of November, ADRA Burundi was exempted because of the nature of its work, its track record and its affiliation with the Adventist church. Now that it had been exempted, Ngba did not want to annoy the government. It was only after an intervention by the ADRA network hierarchy that Ngba was finally asked by the Africa regional office to remain neutral.

Then, in the middle of the battle for the control of church in Burundi, the ECD Committee recommended the shutdown of ADRA Burundi and Ngba was given permanent return to his native country. The ECD had decided to employ a "scorched earth" policy to limit the influence of Ndikubwayo. To do so they were willing to scuttle ADRA Burundi.

Ngba had been appointed in December 2016 by the General Conference on a five-year contract to serve as ADRA Burundi country director. He arrived with his family and placed his children in local schools. When he was terminated via email on May 16, 2018, he was only given three days to leave Burundi. Bjorn Johansen from ADRA Denmark was appointed to replace him.



Ngba tried unsuccessfully to protest the move saying that he needed time for his children to at least complete the school year. Ngba received Johansen and used the short window he had to introduce him to government officials and arranged a handover. But the change in leadership did not go down well with the government officials who said that Johansen's appointment was an affront to the people of Burundi. They also interpreted it as part of the ECDs effort to control the church in Burundi.

The government accused Johansen of coming to Burundi without a work-permit and slapped him with a *persona non grata*, forcing him to leave Burundi. He was accused of not following the law in obtaining the consent of the Ministry of Cooperation before taking office in Burundi. Knowing the sensitivities that the Burundi government had with international NGOs and foreign interference, it was probably a bad idea to replace Ngba with a European expatriate. It might have been better if it had been another African. On the converse, the ECD committee had probably not expected Ndikubwayo's hand in the turn of events.

Ndikubwayo declared that if Ngba was to leave, then he would have to appoint the new country director himself. Seeing the danger of that, the ECD decided to close ADRA Burundi altogether. They asked Ngba to calculate the entire costs of winding up. He made the calculations and informed the ADRA Africa regional office that it would take at least \$320,000 in liabilities to be settled immediately. There would be more costs. He informed them that there were also legal issues and cases in court that needed to be settled before winding up. When he sent the numbers to the division, it presented them with a difficult position since the money was not immediately available to make the settlements. The ECD then decided to withdraw the ADRA license, preventing use of its name or logo.<sup>77</sup> According to Ngba, what was at stake were the jobs of seventy staff members, and the welfare of their families and thousands of vulnerable Burundians benefiting from ADRA's programs.

The government of Burundi immediately issued a li-

cense to former ADRA Burundi (now without a name) but this time as a local NGO. It continues with its activities and Ngba remains in Burundi in the same capacity. Currently funding comes from Germany and Norway and a long-expected partnership with the UN/FAO was nearly scuttled by the leadership crisis. Naturally, this turn of events has caused great satisfaction to Ndikubwayo's camp. And he remains the chair of the board.

### Anti-Corruption Authority Gets Involved

In July 2019, just after Ngba was given a permanent return (and failed to leave), he was summoned by the Anti-Corruption Authority to answer charges against him and ADRA. ADRA had supposedly not followed hiring and procurement procedures, among other charges. He was interrogated for three hours, confronted by what he described as misinformation believed to have been deposited by those opposed to Ndikubwayo.

The Anti-Corruption Authority later went to ADRA Burundi and requested several items, including financial statements and documents related to procurement since January 2018, which corresponded to the period when Mrs. Ndikubwayo joined ADRA Burundi. They are yet to press any charges, if at all.

In August 2019, Ngba and his family went back to Cameroon. While there he was informed by his union that no official information had reached them about his permanent return. In September he went back to Burundi and continued working. Donors (ADRA Germany and ADRA Denmark) requested him to help supervise the closing of their projects and are paying

his salary. He told this writer that he plans to go back home at the beginning of next year though his permanent return has not been confirmed by the Cameroon Union at the time of this publication.

The hiring of Mrs. Ndikubwayo as the finance director at ADRA doubtless escalated the crisis in ADRA Burundi. For a while, ADRA Burundi had operated without the position. Country director Ngba got the consent of the board and the ADRA regional office to hire one.

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After the hiring announcement was issued, Ndikubwayo told Ngba that his wife had been out of work for a while and she wanted to apply for the job. He also said that he was opposed to his wife's request, because he would be attacked for it. Ngba told the president that he did not see any problem in hiring her and in fact insisted that she should apply if she was qualified. Besides, he argued, the hiring decision was made by the HR committee and the board. Ngba insisted that if Mrs. Ndikubwayo was qualified, she should apply. He did not anticipate any problem. He was wrong.

Treasurer Biratevye got wind of the vacant position and went to see Secretary Irakoze to discuss the situation, telling him that he had heard the president wanted to employ his wife as head of finance in ADRA. Biratevye already had someone else in mind for the position and wanted Irakoze to assist him in getting the other person the job. Biratevye then said that it wouldn't be a good idea for the president's wife to take the position because it would be a conflict of interest. Irakoze agreed. They decided to speak with Ndikubwayo about it and tell him that he could not be the chairman of the ADRA Board while his wife was at the same time head of finance at ADRA. Ndikubwayo rebuked them and sent them away.

Mrs. Ndikubwayo had been out of work for seven months after the end of her contract with a US-AID-founded project. For the position of finance director, ADRA Burundi received eight applications and résumés, including hers. The résumés were evaluated by the Human Resources Committee headed by the programs director, Samuel Nzokirantevye. Mrs. Ndikubwayo turned out to be the best. Her previous experience at an international NGO (USAID) doubtless helped. It is important to note that Mrs. Ngba was the head of HR at ADRA Burundi and was a member of that committee.

Irakoze called Ngba and told him about his concerns on the issue of conflict of interest. Apparently, Ngba went to Ndikubwayo and told him what the secretary had said. Ndikubwayo then confronted Irakoze and told him to keep out of the matter.

In October 2017, Ndikubwayo was scheduled to attend the annual meetings at the GC in the USA. It happened that the board date was set for October 8, 2017 when he would be away. Ndikubwayo suggested that the board meeting be postponed until he returned from

America. Ngba stated that there were pressing matters that needed to be dispensed of and suggested that the president could assign someone else to chair the meeting while he was away. It then fell on the secretary, Irakoze, to chair. He added it was proper for him to chair the meeting considering that Ndikubwayo's wife was the subject of a vote. Irakoze agreed to chair the meeting.

On October 8, 2017, Irakoze arrived at 10 a.m. at the ADRA offices to chair the meeting. When he looked at the agenda, he immediately picked out Mrs. Ndikubwayo's name and pointed out that he still felt that there would be a conflict of interest if she were to take up the position. Ngba objected and for an hour their discussion went back and forth. Ngba explained that he would be her direct supervisor and not Ndikubwayo and that the possible conflict of interest situation would be explained during that same board meeting for all to understand. Irakoze was not convinced. Ngba asked him where his wife was employed. He said that his wife was the cashier at the Bujumbura Mission. He asked if that was not in fact a "conflict of interest." Besides, Ngba's own wife was the head of Human Resources at ADRA Burundi and he did not consider that it created a conflict of interest as he did not supervise her directly. He had also reported that situation in his declaration and his wife had also declared in her contract that she was the spouse of the country director.

Irakoze picked up his phone and said he would call the division to find out what they would have to say. Ngba objected to the call and told him that he didn't find it necessary to consult the division on a matter concerning ADRA when the ADRA regional office had already been consulted. Irakoze finally started the meeting and Ngba, who was the secretary, introduced the matter of Ms. Nga-hibare. She was approved. Even though he chaired the meeting and the name had passed, Irakoze was still uncomfortable with the appointment. Shortly afterwards, he approached the president to see if he could revoke the appointment, a fact that would escalate their differences.

### **Mrs. Ndikubwayo's Tenure at ADRA Burundi**

Mrs. Ndikubwayo was hired in October 2017 on a one-year contract which was to end in December 2018. When she began working there, attacks on ADRA Burundi by those opposed to Ndikubwayo increased substantial-



ly. Ngba presented this concern to the regional office in Nairobi. Closer to the end of her contract, in November 2018, Ndikubwayo was relieved of his position. For Ngba, the new development would mean that if Ndikubwayo was to be deployed far from Bujumbura, Mrs. Ndikubwayo would have to go with him, and considering the conflict that had arisen following her hiring, he opted not to renew her contract. Neither Ndikubwayo nor his wife objected to this action.

The hiring of Mrs. Ndikubwayo was repeatedly mentioned as evidence that Ngba supported Ndikubwayo, particularly after Ndikubwayo had declined to vacate office, leading to a major standoff. In May 2019, he was terminated and given a permanent return to go back to his native Cameroon. The hiring of Mrs. Ndikubwayo doubtless, contributed to his woes.

### **Barishinga Arrested**

Lamec Barishinga was first arrested on May 7, 2019, because of some violence that broke out in the Jabe SDA Church in Bujumbura. The youth who were arrested implicated Barishinga, saying that he and Lambert Ntiguma were the ones who had sent them to cause disruptions in that church.<sup>78</sup> Both pastors were arrested based on the testimony. It is not clear if the youth were sent by them or by another with the purpose of putting the two in trouble. It is also not clear if they were part of the *Imboneza*. What happened can only be interpreted as part of the tensions associated with the transition. The prosecutor took them to a judge and they signed a document pledging that they would not break any laws of the country. They were all released together with the youth based on that pledge.

Early in October 2019, Barishinga was due to travel to the US to attend Annual Council at the General Conference.<sup>79</sup> He failed to obtain a US Visa and sent instead a video message to the GC. In that video, he pleaded for support from the world church. After the video had been played, GC President Ted Wilson and the attendees offered a special prayer for Burundi.

Barishinga then wrote a six-page letter to the church members in Burundi using the official letterhead of the church. Those opposed to him immediately accused him of impersonation of the president, as Ndikubwayo remained the legal representative of the church despite his ouster by the ECD. The interior minister, Barandagiye, had issued a letter in April 2019 stating that Ndikubwayo would remain the legal representative of the Adventist Church.

On his way to attend the year-end meetings at the ECD, on October 24, 2019, Barishinga was arrested and sent to Mpimba Prison. He occupies the same cell which Irakoze occupied earlier in the year. At the time of writing this paper, he remains in prison. Others have joined him lately including Lambert Ntiguma, Élisée Manirakiza (the pastor of Kamenge District), Deo Sabimana, and Saidi Gilbert Bimenyimana, among others. Some of them have since been released but Ntiguma, at the time of this report, was yet to be released.

### **The Matter Goes to the Burundian Parliament**

In October 2019, just after Barishinga was arrested, Interior Minister Barandagiye was asked by members of Parliament to explain the crisis in the Adventist church. He stated that he personally did not care whether Nd-

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ikubwayo or Barishinga oversaw the Adventist Church and that his only concern was that their appointment had to be done within the law. He said that the removal of Ndikubwayo was not fair since he had not completed his term, and the ECD had not given any reason for his removal.<sup>80</sup> He said, “We fail to understand if these people are doing God’s work or doing another business.”<sup>81</sup>

He also stated that after the Barishinga faction had appealed his decision to the head of state, he was no longer responsible for the case since the head of state was to make the final decision. He stated that the presidency advised that the General Conference should be invited to resolve the matter and they were duly invited. They agreed that Joseph Ndikubwayo would remain interim leader until they could elect a new leader to replace him.<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusion

The complexities of the situation in the Adventist church in Burundi are greater than we can cover in these pages. On the face of it, the problem is a battle for control between the GC/ECD on the one hand and Joseph Ndikubwayo and the National Government of Burundi on the other hand. But it is much deeper than that. The elephant in the room is toxic ethnicity where the actions of an individual are viewed through an ethnic prism and as such, the individual is despised and can do nothing honorable despite professing the same faith. Ethnic nationalism compounded by limited opportunities, the traditional rivalries between the two nations of Burundi and Rwanda, as well as the former’s sensitivities about interference in its internal affairs, have all played their part in the whole affair. Institutional corruption, noted in the whole issue, reflects waning spirituality and a deviation of the collective moral and ethical calling. In the process, the credibility of the Adventist church and its institutional

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legitimacy in Burundi has been badly dented, undermining its mission and weakening public trust in the institution. At the heart of concerned observers are the 44,000 new members who in 2018 joined the church following the successful TMI program and who are probably wondering whether they made the right decision. The church in Burundi needs someone to climb down from their high horse if only for the sake these new members, young in the faith. All the players must realize that the church is bigger than all of us and that further escalation threatens the ability of the Adventist church to meet its local and global mission.

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31. *Adventist Yearbook 1985* (Takoma Park: Review & Herald, 1985), 42.

32. *Adventist Yearbook 1984* (Takoma Park: Review & Herald, 1984), 231.

33. *Adventist Yearbook 1991* (Takoma Park: Review & Herald, 1991), 54.

34. *Record Magazine* 100, no. 10 (March 18, 1995): 5.

35. Ibid., 94, no. 21 (June 3, 1989): 8.

36. Ibid., 5.

37. Telephone interview with Samuel Ndikumana, Germany, November 19, 2019.

38. Interview with Paul Irakoze, Nairobi, November 13, 2019.

39. Burundi Union Mission *Entretien de fin d’Audit. Resume d’Audit des Etats Financiers au 31 decembre 2017* (Burundi Union Mission Audit Interview. Financial Statement Audit Summary as of December 31, 2017), 4.

40. Interview with Paul Irakoze, Nairobi, November 15, 2019.

41. Interview with Daniel Bavugubusa, Nairobi, November 15, 2019.

42. According to the secretary, he signed the document and immediately left for school at AUA (Adventist University of Africa) where he was undertaking his graduate studies (MDiv), a program he had started in 2017. Much of the printing was done while he was away.

43. The funds for the project were from a private donor and were not church funds.

44. According to Irakoze, the fluctuation of the volatile Burundian Franc to the USD was the reason they could not determine exactly how many books they would print.

45. *Entretien de fin d’Audit*, 3–4. (Translated using Google Translate.)

46. Interview with Joseph Ndikubwayo, November 26, 2019.

47. Interview with Paul Irakoze, *Op cit*.

48. From a letter dated May 7, 2018, purportedly from ECD officers Jerome Habimana and Michel Caballero. The ECD has since distanced itself from the letter and the transfer of funds.

49. From a letter dated August 22, 2018 to Biratevyé written by Secretary Irakoze.

50. Telephone interview with Joseph Ndikubwayo, November 26, 2019.

51. Divisions in the church in Burundi are not new. Right from the year 2000, the cross-ethnic accusations had been witnessed, but it was somewhat contained.

52. From an email written by Moise Niyuhire dated November 11, 2018. The document and its attachments were widely circulated on social media.

53. Ibid.

54. Document authored by Ndikubwayo on January 4, 2019 trying to explain the origin of the crisis.

55. Interview with Ndikubwayo, November 26, 2019.

56. Those objecting the removal of Ndikubwayo on the grounds that he sat in the National Security Council, cite the fact that a previous Burundi Union president, Uzziel Habingabwa (1994–2005), had served as a member of the Elders Council of Burundi and the church had not objected. His father, Senkomo, was also a presidential advisor. Those opposed to them state that the positions held by his predecessors are not exactly comparable to his and the context of their service was also, as we have seen in the history of Burundi, markedly different

57. Telephone interview with Joseph Ndikubwayo, November 26, 2019.

58. Vote number ECD2018-105 of November 6, 2018.

59. Interview with Dan Agwena, Nairobi, November 26, 2019.

60. Interview with Paul Irakoze, Nairobi, November 13, 2019.

61. Ibid.

62. Interview with Paul Irakoze, Nairobi, November 13, 2019.

63. Interview with Dan Agwena, Nairobi, November 26, 2019.

64. From an article written by Paul Irakoze entitled “There is Hope in Signing with the Knees” about his prison experiences.

65. From a letter dated January 3, 2019 written to Division President Dr. Blasius Ruguri by the Adventist Women and Men Organization of Burundi.

66. From *Petition Sur La Destabilisation De L’église Adventiste Du Septieme Jour au Burundi*. (Petition on The Destabilization of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Burundi) authored by the Adventist Women and Men Organization of Burundi, dated January 3, 2019. It was presented to government authorities as protest at the continued recognition of Ndikubwayo despite certain “regrettable actions” that befell his calling as a pastor.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Letter by Ndikubwayo dated January 4, 2019

70. Ibid.

71. From a letter dated January 15, 2019 by ECD Secretary

Alain Coralie to the Executive Committee of the Burundi Union Mission. The letter, written in French, was translated through Google Translate.

72. Telephone interview with Joseph Ndikubwayo, November 26, 2019.

73. Presidential Decree No. 100/167 of October 31, 2019 relating to the appointment of the Permanent Secretary of the Conseil National de Sécurité signed by President Pierre Nkurunziza and First Vice President Gaston Sindimwo. Col. Pierre Claver Nzisabira was appointed to replace him.

74. The West Burundi Field was split in 2014 to create the South-West Burundi Field and the North-West Burundi Field

75. Ibid.

76. Interview with Joel Ngba, November 25, 2019.

77. The first plan was to immediately close ADRA Burundi in June 2018. The high cost of compensating staff and providers was estimated to be in excess of \$500,000, which discouraged the action initiated by the ECD and ADRA International who decided to allow some donors (in particular ADRA Germany and ADRA Denmark) to complete their funded projects by end of December 2019. This is the date when all ADRA Burundi staff contracts naturally end. This allowed ADRA International to withdraw the license given to ADRA Burundi to operate as ADRA. Withdrawing the license meant that ADRA Burundi could no longer use ADRA’s name and logo or initiate any action in the name of ADRA.

78. Interview with Paul Irakoze, *op cit*.

79. The Annual Council was due to be held between October 10–16, 2019 in Silver Spring Maryland. Thereafter, he would attend the ECD Annual Council later that month.

80. He had probably not seen Coralie’s letter of January 15, 2019.

81. Video clip from the Burundian Parliament in which Barandagiye is responding to members.

82. Ibid.



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