

## UNHCR concerned over return of Burundian refugees by Rwanda



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GENEVA – The UN refugee agency expressed concern on Wednesday about the return to Burundi of a large group of Burundian refugees from Kigeme camp in Rwanda. The precise number of the group is not known but is estimated to exceed 400. The returns took place on Tuesday (June 2).

UNHCR recognizes the positive developments in Burundi and the fact that a majority of Burundian refugees no longer have concerns preventing them from going home. Since the start of organized voluntary repatriation in 2002, nearly 480,000 Burundian refugees have returned voluntarily from neighbouring countries in conditions of safety and dignity.

In April, Rwanda, Burundi and UNHCR jointly decided to re-launch sensitisation campaigns and inform some 2,000 remaining Burundian refugees at Kigeme camp in Rwanda about assistance available for repatriation. Since 18 May 2009, more than 1,500 of these 2,000 refugees opted to return voluntarily.

UNHCR is distressed that contrary to the agreement reached during the recent Tripartite Commission session, the refugees in Kigeme camp were deprived of options except to return home immediately. Many of those forced to return intended to do so voluntarily but desired more time to ready themselves for the journey. In light of their many years in exile and strong connections to Rwanda, this is in no way surprising. For some refugees, repatriation may not be the most appropriate solution.

The repatriation of refugees should never be involuntary. The use of force and violence to compel return is not acceptable.