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A One-paragraph Description of the Conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi

Burundi and Rwanda, though governed by different royal families, were very close culturally before colonization, first by Germany then by Belgium. In a vicious application of the “divide and rule” maxim, the Belgians designated the minority Tutsi population (13%) as client rulers, to be educated, given government positions, and recruited to the army, and denied social advancement to Hutus (86%) and Twa (1%). Quaker evangelists from the United States began working in the region in the 1930s. After independence in the early 1960’s, Rwanda became a Hutu-controlled military dictatorship, and in a vengeful fashion, the Tutsi population was suppressed. The 1994 genocide occurred when a primarily Tutsi army of people who had fled to Uganda invaded the country, and the Hutu government retaliated by mobilizing people to kill their civilian Tutsi neighbours. After independence, Burundi became a Tutsi-controlled military dictatorship, and Hutu aspirations were violently repressed, with killing times in 1964 and 1972. In an effort to obtain an education, some Hutus went to other countries. In 1991 when many factors led to an opportunity for change, those who returned demanded and worked for the establishment of a democratic state. This resulted in a Hutu becoming president in the election of 1993. As part of a Tutsi-led military coup, he was killed after 3 months in office. This sparked attacks from both ethnic groups, and Tutsis fled their homes to take shelter near army camps, while many Hutus fled to join rebel armies that began to form in remote areas. Ten years of ethnic war followed.