

Burundi: Grave concerns over violence and excessive use of force ahead of elections

Joint press release, May 18th, 2020

Geneva, Bujumbura, On 20 May 2020, Burundian citizens will vote on triple presidential, legislative and municipal elections. International and Burundian organizations expressed their concern over the multiplication of violent acts during the campaign, which already plant the seeds for dissent and the escalation of electoral unrest on voting day.

Since the beginning of the electoral campaign, civil society has noted with great concern a rise in cases of human rights violations, ethnicity-based hate speech, excessive use of force, political intolerance, clashes between members of political parties, and intimidations and threats towards members of these parties (or individuals perceived as such).

"After five years of tensions in the country, marked by repeated human rights violations, acts of torture, the exile of political actors, human rights defenders and Burundian citizens, we fear these elections will not bring a permanent solution to the sociopolitical crisis affecting the country since 2015. It is high time to make peace and find a democratic exit to a crisis that has lasted for all too long" said Armel Niyongere, Secretary General of SOS-Torture-Burundi.

The last few weeks have taken a heavy toll on human rights. Allegations of violations mention at least 22 deaths, 7 of which were extrajudicial executions and 10 bodies found lifeless; six abductions; two victims of sexual violence, 18 people tortured and 67 arbitrarily arrested. The most affected areas are Bujumbura, Karuzi, Kirundo, Makamba, Muyinga and Cibitoke. Among the registered casualties were three women and two minors. Two more minors were abducted, two women tortured and four women arbitrarily arrested.

A climate of fear, provocation and slander

All these violent outbreaks are coupled with numerous movement restrictions for certain candidates of the opposition, and prohibitions to organize events in

certain places and venues. The reigning climate of fear, provocation and slander risks to turn into more serious clashes during and after the poll. This situation does not bode well for the preservation of peace and the rebuilding of trust between sociopolitical actors.

"Following the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, we encourage the Burundian government to take all necessary measures to protect all its nationals, to investigate all allegations of human rights violations and to punish the culprits. The authorities must take this opportunity to reopen the democratic, civil and political space in the country, thereby allowing free, transparent and credible elections to take place in a peaceful climate" said Gerald Staberock, Secretary General of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

The signatory organizations wish to remind the Burundian authorities and Burundi's international partners that an investigation was opened by the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on the situation in the country since 2015, including on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. It is therefore crucial that all stakeholders pay particular attention to any deterioration of the situation that could arise from the upcoming poll.

Signatory organizations:

- SOS Torture Burundi/ Burundi
- Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture (ACAT-Burundi)
- Collectif des Avocats pour la Défense des Victimes de Crimes de Droit International commis au Burundi (CAVIB)/ Burundi
- Coalition Burundaise des défenseurs des droits humains (CBDDH)
- Association Burundaise des Journalistes en Exil (AJBE)
- Forum pour la conscience et le développement (Focode)
- Forum pour le renforcement de la société civile (Forsc)
- Coalition burundaise pour la Cour pénale internationale (CB-CPI)
- Tournons la Page Burundi (TLP-Burundi)
- Réseau des citoyens probes (RCP)
- Coalition de la société civile pour le monitoring Électoral (Cosome)
- Association burundaise pour la protection des droits humains et personnes détenues (Aprodh)
- Union burundaise des journalistes (UBJ)

- Collectif des associations contre l'impunité? au Togo (CACIT)/Togo
- Mouvement Ivoirien des Droits Humains (MIDH)/ Côte d'Ivoire
- Observatoire des Femmes actives de Côte d'Ivoire (OFACI)/ Côte d'Ivoire
- Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA)/ Cameroun
- Alliance pour l'Universalité des Droits Fondamentaux (AUDF)/ RDC
- Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme (RDDH)/ RDC
- Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture (ACAT/TCHAD)
- Fédération internationale de l'Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture (FIACAT)
- TRIAL International
- Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture (OMCT)

L'Organisation mondiale contre la torture (OMCT) est la principale coalition mondiale d'ONG luttant contre la torture et les mauvais traitements. Elle compte plus de 200 membres dans plus de 90 pays. Son secrétariat international est basé à Genève, en Suisse.

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