

JOINT STATEMENT ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL'S VISIT TO BURUNDI

The United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) visit to Burundi is an important opportunity to reinvigorate efforts to end the current human rights crisis. The undersigned organizations call on UNSC members during their 21 January 2016 visit to urge the Government of Burundi to agree a date for reopening talks and to work to prevent further deterioration of the human rights situation. Insecurity in Burundi has the potential to have disastrous consequences on the peace and stability of the entire Great Lakes region.

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at least 439 people have been killed since the beginning of the crisis in April 2015. On 12 December 2015, dozens of bodies were discovered in the streets of Bujumbura's so-called opposition neighbourhoods, as a result of security forces' search operations. These operations were conducted in response to attacks by rebel groups on three military installations in Bujumbura and one in Bujumbura Rural on 11 December 2015.

On 15 January, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein warned of new trends of human rights violations as the crisis deepens, including "cases of sexual violence by security forces, an increase of cases of enforced disappearances and torture." The High Commissioner also referred to serious allegations of the use of divisive ethnic language during search operations conducted by security forces after the 11 December attacks in opposition neighbourhoods. Further, there are consistent reports, by human rights organizations, pointing to the involvement of the Imbonerakure, the youth group affiliated to the ruling party, during such operations.

The Government of Burundi is facing real security challenges as a more organized armed opposition emerges. We call on the Government of Burundi and armed opposition groups to immediately end human rights violations and abuses, and engage in genuine and inclusive talks to solve the current crisis and pave the way for lasting peace and stability in Burundi.

The UNSC members must call on the Government of Burundi to take necessary measures to end impunity of its security forces by bringing all those suspected of criminal responsibility to justice in fair trials, and end enforced disappearances and the use of torture and other ill-treatment. In addition, Burundian authorities should refrain from disproportionate responses to armed attacks against military targets. We urge members of the UNSC to raise concerns about the involvement of the Imbonerakure in search operations carried out by security forces.

Delays in mediation efforts have contributed to the worsening human rights and security situation, and ordinary Burundians are paying the price. Mediation efforts led by Uganda and the East African Community (EAC) have stalled and failed at getting Burundian stakeholders to address this crisis. We encourage the UNSC to coordinate its actions with the African Union (AU) and urge the AU to step up its role in the mediation efforts.

The UNSC must push both sides to resort to dialogue as a sole means to break the cycle of violence

and avoid a deepening of the crisis and a potential escalation into an ethnic and regional conflict.

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