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ORAL STATEMENT

ITEM 4: Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi

BURUNDI: CLAMPDOWN ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION CONTINUES

UN Human Rights Council
Thirty-fifth session
5 – 23 June 2017

Mr. President,

Amnesty International welcomes the Commission of Inquiry's second oral update.

The enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression in Burundi was under threat before the start of the crisis in 2015, but recent events highlight that there is now a complete lack of space for criticism of or opposition to the government and its views.

Last week, the Mayor of Bujumbura refused to allow Amizero y'Abarundi, the parliamentary opposition coalition, to hold a press conference on the grounds that the coalition did not have a legal personality. The Mayor did not specify if, or how, his refusal was necessary in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others – the only permitted grounds for such a restriction under international law.

Restrictions on the parliamentary opposition are particularly concerning given that amendments to the Penal and Criminal Procedure Codes are on the National Assembly's agenda. Proposed amendments include allowing night-time house searches or searches without a warrant in certain circumstances, which would remove protections against police abuse.

The government continues to target human rights defenders (HRDs) and their supporters, while their work is more necessary than ever. On 5 June, the government spokesperson accused the European Union (EU) of financing 'individuals or organizations involved in the destabilization of the Republic of Burundi'. The EU refuted these accusations indicating that they constituted a deliberate misinterpretation of an HRD support programme.

Amnesty International calls on the Government of Burundi to end restrictions on the work of the political opposition and independent civil society.

We would be grateful if the Commission of Inquiry could indicate the measures it sees as a priority for improving respect for human rights and restoring civic space in Burundi.

Thank you.