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ORAL STATEMENT

ITEM 4: Interactive Dialogue with Commission of Inquiry on Burundi

BURUNDI: END INTERFERENCE IN NGO OPERATIONS

UN Human Rights Council
Forty-third session
24 February – 20 March 2020

Amnesty International thanks the Commission of Inquiry for its oral update.

Since the run-up to the 2015 elections, the Burundian authorities have sought to stifle all forms of dissent. With the 2020 elections fast approaching, rather than restoring respect for human rights, they have intensified the restrictive measures. Two recent actions are particularly concerning.

On 30 January, four journalists from Iwacu media house were sentenced to two and a half years in prison for what the court deemed an “impossible attempt” to threaten internal state security. They had been arrested in October while en route to report on clashes in Bubanza province. The evidence presented against them centred on a joke sent in a WhatsApp message.

We urge the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release them, as they have been imprisoned solely for the exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

In February, the government renewed its efforts to obstruct the work of and intimidate international NGOs by demanding that they provide personal information on all their employees, including their names and ethnic identities. The government did not mention if any safeguards were in place to protect the privacy of all employees or avoid discrimination based on ethnicity; or indeed why these organisations are the only private entities being asked to respect ethnic quotas designed for state institutions.

We urge Burundi to drop this intrusive request for ethnic information that is ultimately interfering with their right to association, and to let all NGOs, national or international, operate freely and safely.

Finally, a question for the Commission of Inquiry: what are your priority recommendations towards ensuring the forthcoming elections take place in an atmosphere in which voters can freely access information, and meaningful debate is protected and facilitated?