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ORAL STATEMENT

ITEM 4: Interactive Dialogue with Commission of Inquiry on Burundi

BURUNDI: CIVIC SPACE REMAINS CLOSED AS ELECTION PREPARATIONS BEGIN

UN Human Rights Council
Fortieth session
25 February – 22 March 2019

Amnesty International thanks the Commission of Inquiry for its oral update and continued monitoring of the situation in Burundi in challenging circumstances.

As Burundi reviews its electoral code and prepares for elections in 2020, there are no indications that the rights to freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly will be respected.

Having been suspended for six months in May 2018, VOA and the BBC broadcasts remain off-air. Many human rights defenders and journalists have fled the country since 2015, five HRDs remain in detention solely for their work, and most independent human rights organizations have been closed. There are regular reports of local members of opposition parties being arrested.

Against this backdrop, the lack of independent international human rights monitors doing public reporting is of deep concern. In December 2018, the Government of Burundi ordered the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to close its country office, having suspended cooperation in 2016. The Office closed on 28 February. As we have heard, the Commission of Inquiry also continues to be denied access to the country. While a small number of African Union human rights monitors are present, the government has consistently refused to sign their memorandum of understanding.

The Government of Burundi denies that there is a human rights crisis in the country. If that is the case, the presence of independent observers should not be a problem for them. We urge Burundi to allow independent NGOs and media houses to reopen and operate freely in the country, to release all human rights defenders detained solely for their work, and to reopen the OHCHR office in the country as a matter of urgency.

Finally, Mr. President, a question for the Commission of Inquiry - in the run-up to the 2020 elections, what other measures does the Commission see as a priority for reopening civic and political space in Burundi?

Thank you, Mr. President.