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ORAL STATEMENT

ITEM 4: Interactive Dialogue with Commission of Inquiry on Burundi

BURUNDI: GENUINE REOPENING OF CIVIC SPACE REQUIRES ACCOUNTABILITY

UN Human Rights Council
Forty-sixth session
22 February – 23 March 2021

Madam President,

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

While the government has taken some steps towards reopening media space, human rights defenders and journalists continue to face serious violations of their rights. In December 2020, we received the welcome news that four journalists from Iwacu Press Group – arrested and convicted simply for doing their work – had been pardoned and released from prison.¹ In late February, the private radio Bonesha FM, was allowed to reopen after almost six years after its offices were attacked by police and their equipment destroyed during the attempted coup in May 2015, and its licence was revoked in 2017.²

In parallel and in stark contrast to these positive developments, on 2 February the Supreme Court posted a notice of its June 2020 judgement finding 34 people guilty of threatening state authority, assassinations and destruction [of property] and sentencing them to life imprisonment. They included 12 human rights defenders and journalists now in exile who were solely prosecuted for protesting against President Nkurunziza's decision to stand for a third term. Such decisions clearly undermine the government's stated commitment to freedom of expression.

Since 2015, serious human rights violations – including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and torture, and including against HRDs – have continued with near total impunity and entrenched a climate of fear.³ In addition to ending the targeting of civil society and the

¹ "One Year Too Long: Burundians Arbitrarily Detained for their Journalism," November 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/one-year-too-long-burundians-arbitrarily-detained-for-their-journalism/>

² *Braving bullets: Excessive force in policing demonstrations in Burundi*, 28 July 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr16/2100/2015/en/>

³ *Conform or flee: Repression and insecurity pushing Burundians into exile*, 29 September 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr16/7139/2017/en/>

media, it is essential that the government ensures accountability for crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations.

How does the Commission assess progress towards ending impunity in Burundi and what other measures would it recommend for a genuine reopening of civic space?

Thank you, Madam President.