



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Amnesty International calls on Burundi at the UN Human Rights Council to immediately and unconditionally release prisoners of conscience

Statement delivered during the Clustered Interactive Dialogue on Burundi at the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council

As the Minister for Human Rights, His Excellency Martin Nivyabandi, acknowledged during Burundi's Universal Periodic Review in January, the country is approaching "a major and decisive turning point in its history", with a referendum on constitutional amendments due to take place in May.¹ Amnesty International believes that such a major national decision should take place in a context where the rights to freedom of expression (including access to information), association and peaceful assembly are fully respected and protected, and where genuine debate can take place without fear of reprisals.

It is therefore deeply disturbing to see the continued clampdown on all forms of dissent. Amnesty International has repeatedly raised the alarm about this crackdown since the start of the political crisis in 2015. Last month, Amnesty International recognized five Burundian human rights defenders as prisoners of conscience.² Germain Rukuki and Nestor Nibitanga are accused of "threatening state security". On Thursday, three other human rights defenders, Emmanuel Nshimirimana, Aimé Constant Gatore and Marius Nizigiyimana, were each sentenced to 10 years in prison on the same charge. The verdict was delivered four days before it was expected, in the absence of the accused and their lawyer. Detained solely on account of their human rights work, we call on the authorities to release all five human rights defenders immediately and unconditionally.

As Burundi supported the Council's resolution calling on OHCHR to dispatch a team of three experts, it is disappointing that, six months later, an agreement has not yet been reached on OHCHR's status of mission in the country and that Burundi continues to refuse to cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry.

Amnesty International urges Burundi to allow full and unfettered access to all parts of the country to all relevant international and regional human rights observers, including the Commission of Inquiry.

¹ Human Rights Council, Draft report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Burundi, 1 February 2018, A/HRC/WG.6/29/L.7

² Amnesty International, 'Burundi: Release prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally', 13 February 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afra6/7887/2018/en/>

Background

Amnesty International delivered the above oral statement at the UN Human Rights Council on 13 March 2018 during the Clustered Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi and the oral update on Burundi by the High Commissioner on Human Rights. Amnesty International previously made a submission for Burundi's Universal Periodic Review that took place on 18 January 2018: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/7539/2017/en/>. On 13 February 2018, Amnesty International issued a public statement urging the Burundian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the five prisoners of conscience: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr16/7887/2018/en/>