

BETWEEN DESPAIR AND RESILIENCE

Burundian human rights defenders in
protracted exile in Rwanda and Uganda



COALITION BURUNDAISE
DES DÉFENSEURS
DES DROITS DE
L'HOMME
CBDDH



DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

Between Despair and Resilience

Burundian human rights defenders in protracted exile in Rwanda and Uganda

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**Burundian human rights defenders in protracted exile in
Rwanda and Uganda**

"We try to be still standing, so that the truth is not concealed but exposed."

*- Burundian HRD in exile in Kigali, Rwanda,
April 2018*

"As a Burundian citizen, my dream is to go back to Burundi. But I have little illusions, the end of exile is not near."

*- Burundian HRD in exile in Kampala, Uganda,
May 2018*

"We need to be able to continue our work in exile. When we are human rights defenders, we are human rights defenders – we cannot stop being it. Helping us to continue our work is a way to help us also financially and psychologically."

*- Burundian HRD in exile in Kigali, Rwanda,
July 2018*

Table of Contents

Acronyms	7
Foreword	8
About DefendDefenders and CBDDH	10
Methodology	11
Executive Summary	12
Burundi's Unresolved Crisis	14
An Exodus of Human Rights Defenders	17
Continuing Human Rights Work in Exile	24
• Civil Society Regrouped	24
• Working Remotely in a Legal Limbo	25
Security in Exile	29
• Living in Fear	29
• Security Challenges for Exiled CSOs	31
A Precarious Socio-Economic Context	34
• The Arduous Step to Self-Sufficiency	34
• The Link Between Economic Factors, Security, and Human Rights Work	36
The Psychological Impact of Protracted Exile	37
• Between Trauma, Despair, and Adaptation	37
• Gaps in Psychosocial Support Mechanisms	38
An Uncertain Future	39
Conclusion	40
Recommendations	41
Annex: Support Mechanisms and Resources	44
• Support Mechanisms for HRDs	44
• Support Mechanisms for Journalists	47
• Organisations Providing Assistance to Urban Refugees in Uganda	50
• Organisations Providing Assistance to Urban Refugees in Rwanda	52
• Physical and Digital Security Resources	53



Acronyms

ACAT	<i>Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture</i> (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)
APRODH	<i>Association burundaise pour la protection des droits humains et des personnes détenues</i> (Burundian Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons)
AU	African Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
CAVIB	<i>Collectif des Avocats pour la Défense des Victimes des Crimes de Droits Internationaux au Burundi</i> (Lawyers Collective for the Defence of Victims of International Crimes in Burundi)
CNDD-FDD	<i>Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie</i> (National Council for the Defence of Democracy–Forces for the Defence of Democracy)
CoI	Commission of Inquiry
CTD	Convention Travel Document
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAC	East African Community
EU	European Union
FIDH	<i>Fédération internationale des droits de l'Homme</i> (International Federation for Human Rights)
HRD	Human Rights Defender
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OLUCOME	<i>Observatoire de Lutte contre la Corruption et les Malversations Economiques</i> (Observatory for the Fight against Corruption and Economic Embezzlement)
PAHRDN	Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network
PARCEM	<i>Parole et Actions pour le Réveil des Consciences et de l'Évolution des Mentalités</i> (Words and Actions for the Awakening of Conscience and the Evolution of Mentality)
RPA	<i>Radio Publique Africaine</i> (African Public Radio)
SNR	<i>Service National de Renseignement</i> (National Intelligence Service)
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN HRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNIIB	United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi



Foreword

At DefendDefenders, we always insist that exile should be a very last resort for human rights defenders (HRDs) at risk, because the challenges of relocating to a new country are enormous. However, back in 2001, I was forced to flee my own country, Somalia, in order to survive. Similarly, the crisis that started in 2015 in Burundi left little choice for most Burundian HRDs. DefendDefenders published “2015: Burundi at a Turning Point: Human rights defenders working in the context of elections,”ⁱ a report that foreshadowed the current political crisis, unless strong action was taken by the international community and national authorities. Sadly, our predictions turned out to be correct. President Pierre Nkurunziza’s decision to tighten his grip on power resulted in a far-reaching crackdown on all independent voices and forced HRDs to flee en masse. Some of the HRDs who did not escape in time are now in prison. Others have been killed or disappeared.

In 2016, we published “Exiled and in limbo: Support mechanisms for human rights defenders in exile in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda,”ⁱⁱ a report that outlined the unique challenges faced by many HRDs in exile in East Africa. At the time, exile was a new experience for most Burundian HRDs. Today, many have been in exile for more than three years, with a resolution to the Burundian crisis nowhere in sight. It was thus necessary to explore how Burundian HRDs have adapted to protracted exile, and which challenges they still face, in order to ensure that they can continue their vital human rights work outside their home country.

As outlined in this report, after three years, Burundian HRDs in exile still have to navigate a sea of difficulties. They work in a legal limbo with limited financial resources, live in fear of persecution, struggle to find sustainable livelihoods, and grapple with the uncertainty of their future. Yet, their unyielding motivation and inspiring resilience has allowed them to reinvent themselves to continue exposing the flagrant human rights violations still taking place in Burundi. HRDs relentlessly communicate with observers who work clandestinely on the ground to feed reports and advocacy efforts. Journalists who used to work in some of Burundi’s biggest radio stations now sit in small newsrooms, shoulder to shoulder, working to keep the world informed. Lawyers, thrown out of Burundi’s courts, have turned to international mechanisms to ensure that victims of abuses are not abandoned, and more importantly, not forgotten.

i DefendDefenders, “2015: Burundi at a Turning Point: Human Rights Defenders Working In the Context of Elections,” January 2015, www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/burundi-2015-en.pdf, Accessed 5 September 2018.

ii DefendDefenders, “Exiled and in Limbo: Support mechanisms for human rights defenders in exile in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda,” June 2016, <https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ExiledandinLimboSept2017.pdf>, Accessed 5 September 2018.



The Burundian government is in a state of denial about the crisis that has turned the country into a humanitarian and human rights emergency. The international community has little access to directly monitor the situation, and HRDs in the country have no possibility to speak up. It is thus exiled HRDs that are the eyes and ears of the international community and the voice of the victims. Their vital documentation and advocacy work allows the world to know what is really happening in Burundi.

The great dream of most HRDs in exile is to return home as soon as possible, to help rebuild Burundi on foundations of peace and human rights. However long it will take, I hope that this dream will become a reality. In the meantime, I trust that they will persevere, because by exposing abuses and promoting human rights, they are already building a better future for their country.

Hassan Shire



**Executive Director of DefendDefenders
Chairperson of the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network**

About DefendDefenders and CBDDH

DefendDefenders

Established in 2005, DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) seeks to strengthen the work of HRDs throughout the sub-region by reducing their vulnerability to the risk of persecution by enhancing their capacity to effectively defend human rights. DefendDefenders focuses its work on Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia (together with Somaliland), South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

DefendDefenders serves as the secretariat of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, which represents hundreds of members consisting of individual HRDs, human rights organisations, and national coalitions that envision a sub-region in which the human rights of every citizen as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are respected and upheld.

DefendDefenders also serves as the secretariat of the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network (PAHRDN). The network was formed as a result of deliberations at the All African Human Rights Defenders Conference (Johannesburg +10) hosted in April 2009 in Kampala, Uganda. The five sub-regional networks forming the PAHRDN are: the North Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (hosted by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies in Tunis), the West African Human Rights Defenders Network (Lomé, Togo), the Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (hosted by the International Commission of Jurists in Johannesburg, South Africa), the Central Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (Douala, Cameroon), and the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (hosted by DefendDefenders in Kampala, Uganda). PAHRDN aims to coordinate activities in the areas of protection, capacity building, and advocacy across the African continent.

Coalition Burundaise des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme

The Burundian Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (CBDDH) is a coalition of organisations defending and promoting human rights in Burundi, with the aim to improve the working environment and the protection of HRDs. CBDDH is a platform established to promote synergy, cooperation, collaboration, and sharing of best practices among HRDs at the national and international levels, to overcome the challenges encountered.

CBDDH was created in 2009 by 11 civil society organisations (CSOs) involved in various human rights sectors throughout the country, and membership is open to all civil society organisations and HRDs who wish to join. The establishment of this Coalition was motivated by a misunderstanding of CSOs' activities by the public authorities, which made the work environment for HRDs increasingly risky in Burundi. It was thus clear that human rights actors in Burundi needed a structure to deal with sensitive issues affecting HRDs in Burundi.



Methodology

This report is based on extensive field and desk research conducted between April and August 2018, with the aim to identify the protection and professional needs of Burundian HRDs in a situation of protracted exile in Rwanda and Uganda. The choice to focus on Rwanda and Uganda was informed by the high concentration of Burundian exiled HRDs in these two countries. In-depth interviews were conducted with 99 HRDs in exile in Uganda and in Rwanda, living in both urban centres and refugee camps. A focus group discussion with a group of journalists in exile in Kigali was also conducted. The interviewed HRDs include staff, members, and volunteers of CSOs, journalists, lawyers, and artists. All were forced to flee Burundi between April 2015 and July 2018 because of their human rights work. These in-person interviews were complemented with online communication with two HRDs in exile outside the African continent, online surveys with 15 respondents, and meetings with relevant stakeholders and diplomatic missions.

The figures in this report are based on the aforementioned sample size, and give an indication of current trends. However, they may not represent the full population of Burundian HRDs in exile.

The names and identifying markers of all sources have been deliberately omitted to ensure their safety. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the individuals who shared their testimonies and insights for the compilation of this report.

Note to reader

This report is based on interviews conducted in French and Kirundi, and some of the original sources used are in French. All translations have been done by the authors of the report, with attention to keeping the original meaning of testimonies and written statements.

Executive Summary

When President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for a third presidential term in April 2015, independent media and civil society organisations opposed his move on the basis of its unconstitutionality. What followed was a full-fledged crackdown on civil society that has driven, and continues to drive, HRDs into exile, from staff of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to journalists and lawyers. Rwanda and Uganda are the two countries in the region that host most of these exiled HRDs.

Over three years after the eruption of the crisis, Burundian HRDs in exile have not lost their motivation, and continue to work tirelessly to expose human rights abuses in the country. Coming together in their countries of exile, they have revitalised their previous organisations and created new initiatives. Unable to be on the ground, exiled HRDs have often focused on monitoring and advocacy activities, using a network of observers who work clandestinely throughout Burundi.

The context of work in exile presents HRDs with sizeable challenges, such as receiving funding without an official legal framework in their host country, verifying information without access to primary sources, and travelling as refugees for advocacy missions, conferences, and trainings. Furthermore, after fleeing Burundi because of direct threats, HRDs continue to feel insecure while in exile, as they fear the infiltration of the *Imbonerakure* youth militia and agents of the *Service National de Renseignement* (SNR). 40 percent of the HRDs interviewed also reported having experienced security incidents in their country of exile. Yet, short of funding, exiled CSOs often lack adapted security plans as well as emergency protection mechanisms.

Burundian HRDs in exile also struggle to integrate economically in their host countries, and they often continue to depend on aid and the support of friends and family members, despite their protracted exile. For some, the struggle for self-sufficiency has an impact on their security and threatens their human rights work, as they may choose to leave their fellow HRDs for places where life is cheaper or economic integration easier. This drop in the standard of living, paired with the uncertainty of an exile that seems to have no end date, can affect HRDs' psychological wellbeing and their ability to plan for their future.

Based on the testimonies of more than 100 Burundian HRDs, this report highlights their achievements as well as their professional, security, and socio-economic challenges in the context of protracted exile in Uganda and Rwanda. It paints a picture of hope and resilience, but also highlights a risk of dissolution and despair, calling for renewed support for the vital work done by Burundian HRDs to ensure that human rights abuses in Burundi are exposed and human rights values are upheld.





Burundi's Unresolved Crisis

Burundi's post-colonial history is characterised by a series of violent domestic conflicts, stemming from ethnic divisions constructed and reinforced under Belgian colonial rule.¹ Negotiations started in 1995 resulted in the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi (hereafter "Arusha Agreement"), which formed the basis of the 2005 Constitution and marked the beginning of a period of stability and reconstruction.²

Article 96 of the 2005 Constitution provides for a presidential mandate of five years that can be renewed once through elections.³ On 25 April 2015, however, President Pierre Nkurunziza announced that he would seek a third mandate, claiming that he was eligible for another term because his first in 2005 was not decided by a general vote but by legislators.⁴ Denouncing President Nkurunziza's move as unconstitutional, the *Halte au Troisième Mandat* ("No Third Term") campaign, a citizens' movement initiated by CSOs, organised widespread peaceful demonstrations. These were violently repressed by Burundi's security services with the support of *Imbonerakure* militia, composed of the youth branch of the ruling *Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD-FDD) party. The repression grew even more violent in the aftermath of

a failed *coup d'État* on 13 May 2015.⁵ In July 2015, presidential elections, held in a climate of repression and fear, resulted in a third mandate for President Nkurunziza, who won the elections with almost 70 percent of the vote, while his nearest rival took only 19 percent.⁶ Violence continued to escalate in the following months, fuelled by hate speech, incitement to ethnic violence, and impunity for perpetrators.

In December 2015, the African Union's (AU) Peace and Security Council, deeply worried about increasing violence in the country, voted to send a peacekeeping force into Burundi, but was later forced to backtrack due to opposition and lack of cooperation by the Burundian government.⁷ The AU also established a mission of human rights observers and military experts to be deployed in Burundi starting from November 2016, but their ability to work in the country has been constrained by limited access.⁸ Attempts to bring a peaceful resolution to the crisis have been channeled through the East African Community (EAC) led inter-Burundian dialogue, with former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa as the facilitator and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni as the mediator. However, progress soon stalled because of the nominal commitment by the Burundian government and the exclusion of

5 Al Jazeera, "President 'back in Burundi' after army says coup failed", 15 May 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/president-burundi-army-coup-failed-150515002113225.html>, Accessed 20 August 2018.

6 Reuters, "Burundi's Nkurunziza wins presidential vote boycotted by rivals", 24 July 2015 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burundi-election-results/burundis-nkurunziza-wins-presidential-vote-boycotted-by-rivals-idUSKCN0PY1TN2015072>, Accessed 17 August 2018.

7 Africa Union Peace and Security Council, Communiqué PSC//PR/COMM.(DLXV), 17 December 2015 <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc.565.comm.burundi.17.12.2015.pdf>, Accessed 20 August 2018.

8 The Africa-EU partnership, "Support to the African Union Human Rights Observers and Military Experts Mission in Burundi", <https://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en/projects/support-african-union-human-rights-observers-and-military-experts-mission-burundi>, Accessed 5 September 2018.

1 Janvier D. Nkurunziza, SE-Oxford Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development; "The origin and persistence of state fragility in Burundi", April 2018 <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Burundi-report-v2.pdf>, Accessed 23 August 2018.

2 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi, 28 August 2000, https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/sites/default/files/accords/Arusha_Peace_Accord_.pdf, Accessed 15 August 2018.

3 Article 96, Burundi's Constitution (2005), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burundi_2005.pdf, Accessed 23 August 2018.

4 The Guardian, "Hundreds protest in Burundi over president's third term", 26 April 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/26/protest-burundi-president-third-term-bujumbura-pierre-nkurunziza>, Accessed 20 August 2018.



key opposition and civil society members.⁹

The rapid deterioration of Burundi's human rights situation also prompted the establishment of the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi (UNIIB) in December 2015, followed by a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on Burundi in September 2016.¹⁰ After UNIIB presented its final report in September 2016, Burundi declared its three independent experts *personae non gratae*, severed ties with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and rejected any cooperation with the CoI.¹¹ In September 2017, the CoI reported in its first comprehensive report that there were reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been, and continued to be committed, in Burundi since April 2015.¹² After the renewal of its mandate in September 2017, the CoI has continued to highlight human rights violations and abuses in the country and to denounce a persisting climate of threats and intimidation.¹³ In its latest report published on 5 September 2018, the CoI highlighted the effective control of Burundian authorities over the *Imbonerakure*, and the militia's increasing role in harassing the population. It also pointed to the economic impact of the crisis, and supplemented the list of alleged perpetrators

of crimes against humanity it identified during its initial mandate period.¹⁴

After the International Criminal Court (ICC) launched a preliminary examination of the situation in the country, Burundi became the first and only nation to withdraw from the Rome Statute, a decision that took effect on 27 October 2017.¹⁵ The ICC, however, continues to exercise its jurisdiction for the period before the withdrawal and is currently conducting a full investigation of alleged crimes against humanity committed between 26 April 2015 and 26 October 2017.¹⁶

In May 2018, Burundi held a referendum that resulted in the promulgation, on 7 June 2018, of a new Constitution that forbids the extradition of Burundian nationals (Article 50), expands the duration of the presidential mandate by two years, and removes presidential term limits (Article 97).¹⁷ This was decried by observers as a move to allow President Nkurunziza to run for two more terms in office, and as a further erosion of the Arusha Agreement. Yet, in a surprise move, President Nkurunziza declared, on 7 June 2018, that his "mandate will end in 2020" and that he will support the future President of the Republic.¹⁸ Although this cryptic statement was welcomed by several countries, it is by no means a clear commitment not to

9 International Business Times, "Arusha peace talks in tatters as Burundi government rejects presence of opposition members", 12 July 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/arusha-peace-talks-tatters-burundi-government-rejects-presence-opposition-members-1570233>, Accessed 5 September 2018.

10 United Nations Human Rights Council, "United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi", <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/uniib/pages/uniib.aspx> and "Commission of Inquiry on Burundi", <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/coiburundi/pages/coiburundi.aspx>, Accessed 10 August 2018.

11 DefendDefenders, "Headlong Rush: Burundi's behaviour as a member of the UN Human Rights Council", July 2018. <https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Headlong-rush.pdf>

12 UNGA, A/HRC/36/54m "Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi", 11 August 2017, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/237/46/PDF/G1723746.pdf?OpenElement>, Accessed 17 August 2018.

13 OHCHR, "Burundi: Commission of inquiry calls on the International Criminal Court to investigate possible crimes against humanity", 4 September 2017, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22016&langID=>, Accessed 18 August 2018.

14 OHCHR, "Burundi: the Commission of Inquiry is deeply concerned by the freedom of action and the impunity of the Imbonerakure", 5 September 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23502&LangID=E>, Accessed 5 September 2018

15 The Guardian, "Burundi becomes first nation to leave International Criminal Court", 27 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/oct/28/burundi-becomes-first-nation-to-leave-international-criminal-court>, Accessed 15 August 2018.

16 International Criminal Court, "Burundi: Situation in the Republic of Burundi ICC-01/17", <https://www.icc-cpi.int/burundi>, Accessed 15 August 2018.

17 Al Jazeera, "Burundi backs new constitution extending presidential term limits", 22 May 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2018/05/burundi-backs-constitution-extending-presidential-term-limits-180521134736408.html>, Accessed 15 August 2019. The full text of the new Constitution can be found here: <https://www.presidence.gov.bi/2018/07/03/6271/>

18 Al Jazeera, "Burundi's Pierre Nkurunziza says he will step down in 2020", 7 June 2018 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/burundi-pierre-nkurunziza-step-2020-180607160413061.html>, Accessed 15 August 2018

run for president in the upcoming election, scheduled for 2020, and should not obscure the context in which the referendum campaign was conducted. Indeed, the referendum period was characterised by renewed repression, intimidation, violence, and a further crackdown on independent media and civil society.¹⁹

The crisis that started in April 2015 plunged Burundi into a period of economic recession, as financial aid to the country was largely suspended, investment declined, and foreign exchange reserves drained.²⁰ On 14 March 2016, the government lost its main development partner, as the European Union (EU) suspended direct aid to Burundi's administration, channeling it instead to humanitarian and human rights projects. This was a consequence of Burundi's disrespect of human rights on the basis of the Partnership Agreement between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, and the European Community and its Member States, known as the Cotonou Agreement.²¹ The drop in foreign aid and investment marked a reduction in spending on the social sector, including health and rural development, and the Burundian population has since witnessed a continuous decline in living conditions.²² Burundi's agricultural production has also drastically reduced, and food prices have increased to up to 50 percent, resulting in widespread food insecurity and malnutrition.²³

19 Human Rights Watch, "We Will Beat You to Correct You: Abuses Ahead of Burundi's Constitutional Referendum", 18 May 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/05/18/we-will-beat-you-correct-you/abuses-ahead-burundis-constitutional-referendum>, Accessed 18 August 2018.

20 African Development Bank Group, "Perspectives Économiques en Afrique 2018: Burundi", 2018, https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Generic-Documents/country_notes/Burundi_note_pays.pdf, Accessed 20 August 2018.

21 European Union External Action, "Burundi and the EU", last updated 11 May 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/generic-warning-system-taxonomy/404_en/996/Burundi%20and%20the%20EU, Accessed 20 August 2018. The full text of the Cotonou Agreement can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/cotonou-agreement_en.pdf

22 Janvier D. Nkurunziza, SE-Oxford Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development; "The origin and persistence of state fragility in Burundi", April 2018 <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Burundi-report-v2.pdf>

23 European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

A study conducted in November 2017 by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates that 3.6 million people – a third of the Burundian population – are in need of humanitarian aid in 2018, up from 3 million in 2017.²⁴ In addition, 570,000 Burundians have been displaced, including more than 320,000 refugees who have left the country since April 2015.²⁵

This steady decline, not only in human rights but also in the humanitarian and economic situation in Burundi, shows that what started in 2015 is not merely a political impasse, but a multifaceted crisis that continues to this day. Observers fear that by eroding the foundations of the Arusha Agreement, the crisis threatens Burundi's long-term prospects for peace, development, and stability.²⁶ Indeed, it is the Arusha Agreement that, after four years of strenuous negotiations, managed to break the cycle of political and ethnic violence that resulted in the death of more than 300,000 people in over a decade of conflict.²⁷

Operations, "Burundi", https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/africa/burundi_en (last updated 17 May 2018, accessed 20 August 2018).

24 UNOCHA, "2018 aperçu des besoins humanitaires: Burundi", November 2017 https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/hno_burundi_2018_fr.pdf

25 UNHCR, "Burundi situation", last updated 31 July 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/burundi>, Accessed 17 August 2018.

26 Janvier D. Nkurunziza, SE-Oxford Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development; "The origin and persistence of state fragility in Burundi", <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Burundi-report-v2.pdf>, April 2018.

27 Thierry Vircoulon, International Crisis Group, "The Political and Security Crisis in Burundi", <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/political-and-security-crisis-burundi>, 9 December 2015 (accessed 20 August 2018).



An Exodus of Human Rights Defenders

Burundi saw the establishment of the first human rights organisation in the country, the *Ligue Burundaise des Droits de l'Homme* ITEKA (Ligue ITEKA), in 1990.²⁸ Many others were founded after the creation of a legal framework for the registration of NGOs following the transition to a multi-party system in 1992.²⁹ Burundi's civil society continued to develop after the signing of the Arusha Agreement, often playing the role of watchdog for its implementation, and advocating for respect for democratic principles.³⁰ Before the crisis erupted in 2015, Burundian HRDs were particularly outspoken in their human rights work, tackling issues including prisoners' rights, corruption, justice, women's rights, youth empowerment, and environmental protection.

Burundi also had a diverse and dynamic media landscape, including a number of independent radio stations that were able to reach a large portion of the Burundian population, especially in rural areas.³¹ In addition, several CSOs and media outlets often worked together in human rights campaigns, starting with the campaign "Justice for Ernest Manirumva", after Ernest Manirumva, member of the *Observatoire de Lutte contre la Corruption et les Malversations Economiques* (OLUCOME), was assassinated in 2009, highlighting the risks for outspoken HRDs and the need for CSOs to collaborate in their advocacy efforts.³² Similar joint efforts were the

Campagne contre la vie chère ("Campaign against Rising Living Costs") in 2011, or the *Vendredi Vert* ("Green Friday"), for the liberation of Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, founder and President of the *Association burundaise pour la protection des droits humains et des personnes détenues* (APRODH) after his arrest in 2014.³³ This synergistic collaboration was demonstrated in the anti-third mandate campaign in 2015.

The 2015 crisis resulted in the destruction of this vibrant civil society and a mass exodus of HRDs. Many Burundian HRDs had experienced various kinds of harassment, threats, and intimidation before April 2015, especially those who worked on particularly sensitive topics exposing the wrongdoings of the Burundian state, for instance by reporting on human rights violations perpetrated by the national security apparatus, investigating corruption, or simply talking critically about governance.³⁴ However, as one HRD interviewed for this report described, "the crisis of 2015 was the straw that broke the camel's back."³⁵ In 2015, threats against, and risks faced by, HRDs quickly escalated, forcing many to leave the country.

The escalation of threats against HRDs has often been linked to their opposition to President Nkurunziza's bid for a third mandate on the basis of its unconstitutionality and disregard for the Arusha Agreement. Similarly, HRDs reported that any involvement with the peaceful demonstrations against the third mandate, even if limited to the provision of legal or medical aid to protesters, earned them the labels of "enemies of the state" or "insurgents"

28 DefendDefenders, "2015: Burundi at a turning point: Human rights defenders working in the context of elections", January 2015, <https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/burundi-2015-en.pdf>

29 Eva Palmans, "L'évolution de la société civile au Burundi", *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs*, Annuaire 2005-2006, <http://www.ua.ac.be/objets/00151014.pdf>

30 Ibid.

31 DefendDefenders, "Don't shoot the messenger: Journalists as human rights defenders in the East and Horn of Africa", October 2017, <https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/DontShootTheMessenger.pdf>,

32 Protection International, "Burundi: Justice for Ernest Manirumva", 2010, <https://www.protectioninternational.org/en/node/587>, Accessed 29 August 2018.

33 DefendDefenders, "2015: Burundi at a turning point: Human rights defenders working in the context of elections", January 2015, <https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/burundi-2015-en.pdf>

34 Ibid

35 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kampala, May 2018.

and resulted in serious repercussions. Threats also extended to musicians who had written songs in celebration of peace and human rights, which were used by protesters during the demonstrations.³⁶ After the failed coup, many HRDs were accused of being involved in the attempt to overthrow the government.

The crackdown on civil society that followed the anti-third term movement was far-reaching. Independent media were accused of supporting the protests, and, on 26 April 2015, the *Radio Publique Africaine* (RPA), *Bonesha FM*, and *Radio Isanganiro*, three independent stations, were forced off the air. After the attempted coup of 13 May 2015, at least five radio stations were attacked by unidentified men armed with weapons and grenades. Among them was RPA, which had resumed broadcasting a few hours before the attack, and which was deliberately set ablaze after airing the General who led the attempted coup, Godefroid Niyombare.³⁷

In August 2015, Burundi's Attorney General produced a report incriminating the main civil society leaders, along with opposition figures, for colluding with the organisers of the failed coup and destroying property during the demonstrations.³⁸ The government also issued international arrest warrants for prominent HRDs, such as Justine Nkurunziza, Pacifique Nininahazwe, Vital Nshimirimana, and Armel Niyongere.³⁹ On 3 August 2015, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, one of Burundi's

leading HRDs, survived an attempt on his life, when he was shot in the face and neck.⁴⁰ In October 2015, unidentified persons armed with rifles and grenades killed his son-in-law, Pascal Nshimirimana, and in November 2015, Mbonimpa's son, Welly Fleury Nzitonda, was arrested, and later found dead.⁴¹ In November 2015, the Burundian Ministry of Interior ordered the suspension of ten CSOs, including the main human rights organisations in the country, many of which have since been deregistered.⁴² CSOs also had their offices searched and their bank accounts frozen.⁴³ On 10 December 2015, Marie-Claudette Kwizera, Treasurer of Ligue ITEKA, was abducted and forcibly disappeared despite her family paying the ransom that had been demanded by the SNR.⁴⁴

The vast majority of HRDs interviewed for this report experienced direct threats. The most common type of threats were harassment, intimidation, and surveillance, mentioned by about 60 percent of the HRDs interviewed; followed by arrest warrants or actual arrests, reported by 30 percent of them. These HRDs were often arbitrarily detained, and some were tortured or otherwise ill-treated while in custody. 15 percent of the HRDs also had their houses or offices searched, robbed, burned, or marked for demolition. 13 percent of HRDs reported physical attacks and 7 percent received indirect threats. According to the testimonies of HRDs, the persecution was implemented by *Imbonerakure* militias and all

36 Music in Africa, "Burundi musicians menaced, silenced and fleeing the country", 29 September 2015, <https://www.musicinafrica.net/magazine/burundi-musicians-menaced-silenced-and-fleeing-country>, Accessed 15 August 2018.

37 Amnesty International, "Burundi: Media clampdown intensifies in aftermath of coup attempt", 10 June 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/06/burundi-media-clampdown-intensifies-after-coup-attempt/>, Accessed 15 August 2018.

38 Radio France Internationale, "Soulèvement au Burundi: un rapport des autorités accable l'opposition". 10 September 2015, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20150910-soulevement-burundi-rapport-autorites-accable-opposition>, Accessed 29 August 2018.

39 Human Rights Council, A/HRC/33/37, "Report of the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi (UNIIB) established pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-24/1", 20 September 2016, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_HRC_33_37_E_AUV_.pdf

40 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, "Press Release on the assassination attempt on Mr. Pierre Claver Mbonimpa," 5 August 2015, www.achpr.org/press/2015/08/d273/, Accessed 15 August 2018.

41 FIDH, "Burundi: Assassination of Mr. Welli Nzitonda, son of Mr. Pierre Claver Mbonimpa", www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/burundi-assassination-of-mr-wellinzitonda-son-of-mr-pierre-claver, Accessed 20 August 2018.

42 FIDH, "Burundi: temporary suspension of 10 NGOs defending human rights", 6 November 2015 <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/burundi/burundi-temporary-suspension-of-10-ngos-defending-human-rights>, Accessed 21 August 2018.

43 Ibid.

44 FIDH, "Burundi: No news from Marie-Claudette Kwizera since her kidnapping, the Observatory refers the case to the UN," 22 January 2016, www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/burundi/burundi-no-news-from-marie-claudette-kwizera-since-her-kidnapping-the, Accessed 21 August 2018.

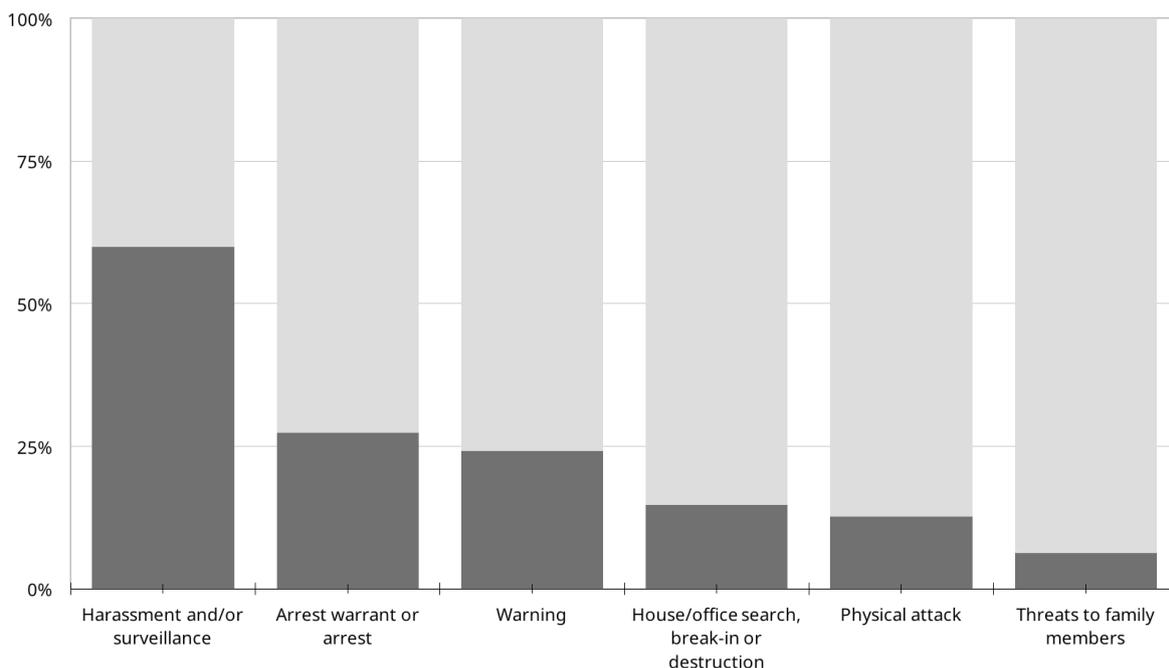


organs of the Burundian security apparatus, from the SNR to special units, and the local police. Over a quarter of the HRDs interviewed reported being subjected to more than one type of threat.

"We are not in exile because we committed crimes or had enemies in Burundi. We are in exile because of threats to our security, because people, sometimes even people in power, told us: 'you have to leave or you will be killed.'"⁴⁵

Reasons for Exile

Threats experienced by HRDs before exile⁴⁶



Many HRDs went into exile as a measure of last resort, as they tried to escape repression by changing their place of residence or going into hiding. These strategies, however, did not shield them from persecution. For example, many reported that they continued being surveilled after they had moved away from their normal place of residence. 25 percent of the HRDs interviewed reported that their decision to leave Burundi was triggered by warnings received by acquaintances within security circles or the political establishment, who convinced them of the gravity of the threats against them. In several cases, the decision to leave the country was taken in a hurry, to the point that some HRDs did not have time to process travel documents, having to escape without a passport. One HRD reported crossing into the Democratic Republic of the Congo

(DRC) to reach Rwanda; another mentioned walking for a week to cross the border unnoticed. In general, a thorough evaluation of the place of refuge was often not undertaken, especially since many HRDs did not expect to find themselves in exile three years later.

⁴⁵ DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian journalist in exile in Kigali, Rwanda, July 2018.

⁴⁶ This figure is based on the analysis of face to face interviews and online surveys and it shows how often HRDs have reported experiencing each type of threat in their testimony. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews conducted, it is possible that the real number is higher, as HRDs may not have mentioned each of the threats and security incident that they experienced.

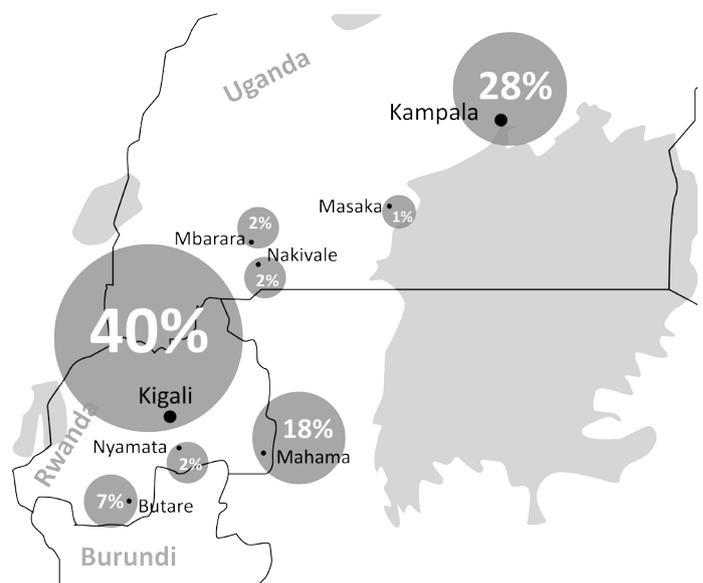


"The moment I fled I did not think I would be away for long. I thought that I would return and continue my work. So I did not really choose a place to settle."⁴⁷

Whereas Tanzania hosts the majority of Burundian refugees, most HRDs went into exile in Rwanda and Uganda.⁴⁸ 67 percent of the HRDs contacted during this research are currently living in Rwanda, while 33 percent reside in Uganda.⁴⁹ Others are now in third countries, including in Europe and North America, where they obtained or have applied for refugee status. The existence of a network of acquaintances or the presence of other HRDs belonging to the same organisation or practicing the same profession were key factors in HRDs' choices of settling in Rwanda and Uganda. Security and stability figured as primary factors for choosing Rwanda, while the majority of the HRDs interviewed in Uganda mentioned the lower cost of living and opportunities for economic integration as crucial in their choice. A few HRDs also preferred Rwanda because of cultural and linguistic similarities, while others preferred Uganda because of greater freedom of expression, as an opportunity to improve their language skills by living in an English-speaking environment, and to avoid direct proximity to Burundi for security reasons.

In both Rwanda and Uganda, most HRDs settled in urban areas to better continue their work, to have access to more economic opportunities, and on the basis of security considerations. About 20 percent of the interviewed HRDs are currently living in refugee camps, with the great majority in Mahama refugee camp in

Rwanda, and a few in Nakivale settlement in Uganda. The decision to settle in the camps was mostly dictated by economic necessity, as aid and services for refugees remain limited in urban areas. In a few cases, the HRDs in Mahama camp also had the perception that living in a close-knit community can guarantee better security. Four of the HRDs interviewed currently living in urban areas have spent time in refugee camps upon their arrival, but the opposite move has also occurred for two HRDs who ran out of resources to sustain themselves in Kigali and were forced to move to Mahama camp.⁵⁰



The diversity of HRDs currently in exile may be a sign of the extent of the persecution. In addition to members of human rights organisations, HRDs who were forced to flee include journalists, lawyers, trade-unionists, and artists. Moreover, the persecution of critical voices did not stop with the end of the anti-third term demonstrations. In July 2016, Jean Bigirimana, a journalist with the independent newspaper IWACU, was arrested and forcibly disappeared. To date, his whereabouts remain unknown.⁵¹

47 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kigali, Rwanda, July 2018.

48 UNHCR, "Burundi situation", 30 June 2018, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/burundi#_ga=2.51036841.1249334209.1533552302-1557604833.1533552302, Accessed 6 August 2018.

49 This figures do not include the two HRDs who were interviewed remotely and who are currently living outside the African continent.

50 This figure is based on the number of HRDs interviewed for this research who are currently living in Uganda and Rwanda. The two HRDs interviewed remotely outside the two countries were not considered.

51 Human Rights Watch, "One Year On, Burundian Journalist Still Missing", 27 July 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/27/one-year-burundian-journalist-still-missing>, Accessed 21 August 2018.

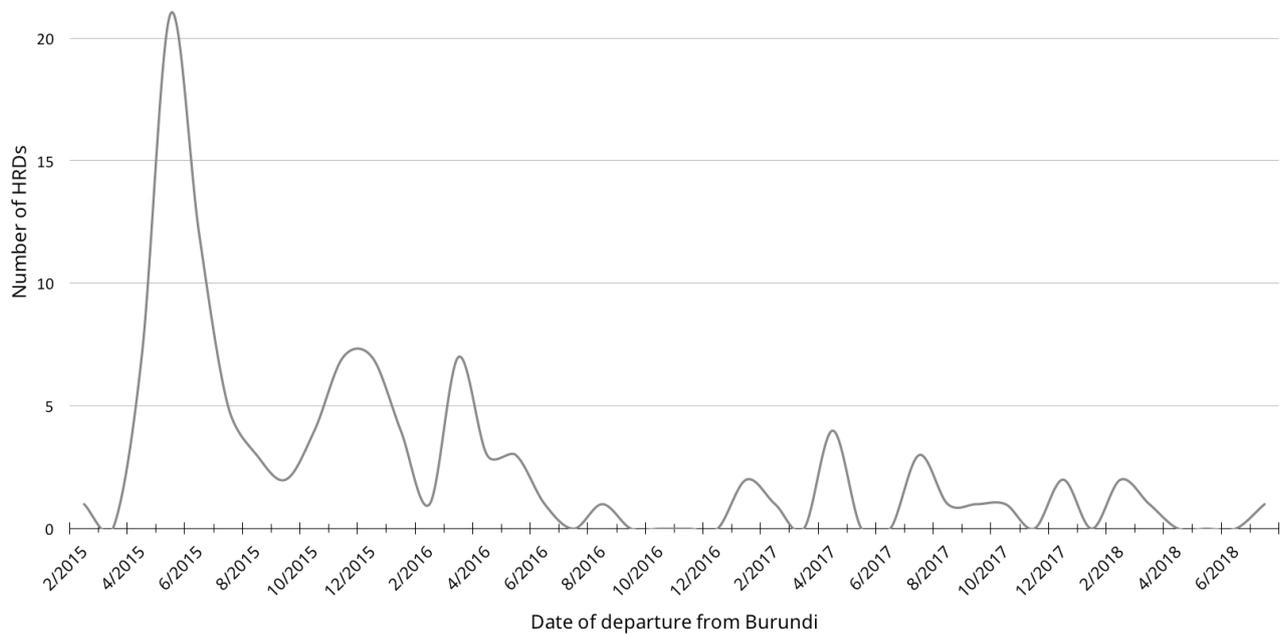


Emmanuel Nshimirimana, Aimé Constant Gatore, and Marius Nizigama from *Parole et Actions pour le Réveil des Consciences et de l'Évolution des Mentalités* (PARCEM), one of the few remaining civil society organisations operating in Burundi, were sentenced to 10 years in prison on 8 March 2018.⁵² Germain Rukuki, who collaborated with the NGO *Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture* (ACAT), was arrested and sentenced to an unprecedented 32 years in prison on 26 April 2018,⁵³ on charges of participation in an insurrectional movement, undermining state security, and rebellion.

Two weeks before the constitutional referendum of May 2018, the government also suspended the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA) from broadcasting in the country.⁵⁴ Nestor Nibitanga, former member of the deregistered APRODH was sentenced to five years in prison on 14 August 2018.⁵⁵ Some HRDs reported that even CSOs that seem to have been left untouched by the crisis face insurmountable challenges to their work through daily intimidation, for example through the denial of authorisations to carry out activities and hold events. More HRDs continue to be forced out of Burundi, while hardly any HRD has been able to safely return. As of the publication of this report, many HRDs have been in exile for more than three years.

HRD Exodus Over Time

Number of HRDs by departure date⁵⁶



52 Amnesty International, "Human rights defenders sentenced to 10 years", 11 June 2018, https://ua.amnesty.ch/urgent-actions/2018/02/031-18/031-18-1?ua_language=en, Accessed 15 August 2018.

53 FIDH, "Sentenced to 32 years in prison, Germain Rukuki is the victim of a travesty of justice", 30 April 2018, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/sentenced-to-32-years-in-prison-germain-rukuki-is-the-victim-of-a>

54 Reuters, "Burundi bans the BBC, VOA two weeks before referendum", 27 July 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burundi-politics/burundi-bans-the-bbc-voa-two-weeks-before-referendum-idUSKBN1I51UK>, Accessed 21 August 2018.

55 News 24, "Burundi rights activist handed five-year term", 14 August 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/burundi-rights-activist-handed-five-year-term-20180814>, Accessed 20 August 2018.

56 Figure based on the date of departure from Burundi indicated by 100 HRDs interviewed between May and July 2018.

Refugee Policy in Uganda and Rwanda

Uganda

Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa, and the second largest in the world, as it currently receives simultaneous influxes from neighbouring countries such as South Sudan, DRC, and Burundi.⁵⁷ Uganda is a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (henceforth “the 1951 Convention”) and its 1967 Protocol, reflected in the Uganda Refugees Act (2006) and in the Refugees Regulations (2010), which determine the country’s refugee policy, often considered one of the most progressive in the world.⁵⁸ In fact, the Refugees Act contains strong provisions for refugee rights, including the right to work, the right to access basic services, and freedom of movement.⁵⁹ Uganda’s refugee policy is also characterised by a focus on sustainability, as settlement-based refugees are provided with a plot of land for self-sustenance. The Act, however, prohibits refugees from conducting “any political activities,” which could be used to prevent exiled HRDs from engaging in human rights work.⁶⁰

Despite Uganda’s welcoming policy, refugees face integration challenges, with education being one of the most cited problems for refugees across Uganda, as families struggle to afford school fees due to their limited livelihoods.⁶¹ Furthermore, many exiled

Furthermore, many exiled HRDs face serious problems as services for refugees are scarce in urban areas.⁶² At the beginning of 2018, Uganda’s highly praised model was scarred by a corruption scandal in the management of refugee operations. Investigations are still ongoing.⁶³

As of June 2018, more than 42,000 Burundian refugees were registered in Uganda, with 7,800 living in Kampala.⁶⁴ In June 2017, the Ugandan government revoked *prima facie* status for Burundian asylum seekers, meaning that Burundian nationals seeking asylum in Uganda after this date need to go through the process of refugee status determination on a case by case basis.⁶⁵

57 UNHCR, “Figures at a glance”, last updated 19 June 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>, Accessed 13 August 2018.

58 UNDP, “Uganda’s contribution to refugee protection and management”, 2017 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64687>

59 The Refugees Act (21/2006), 4 August 2006 and The Refugees Regulations (9/2010).

60 Ibid.

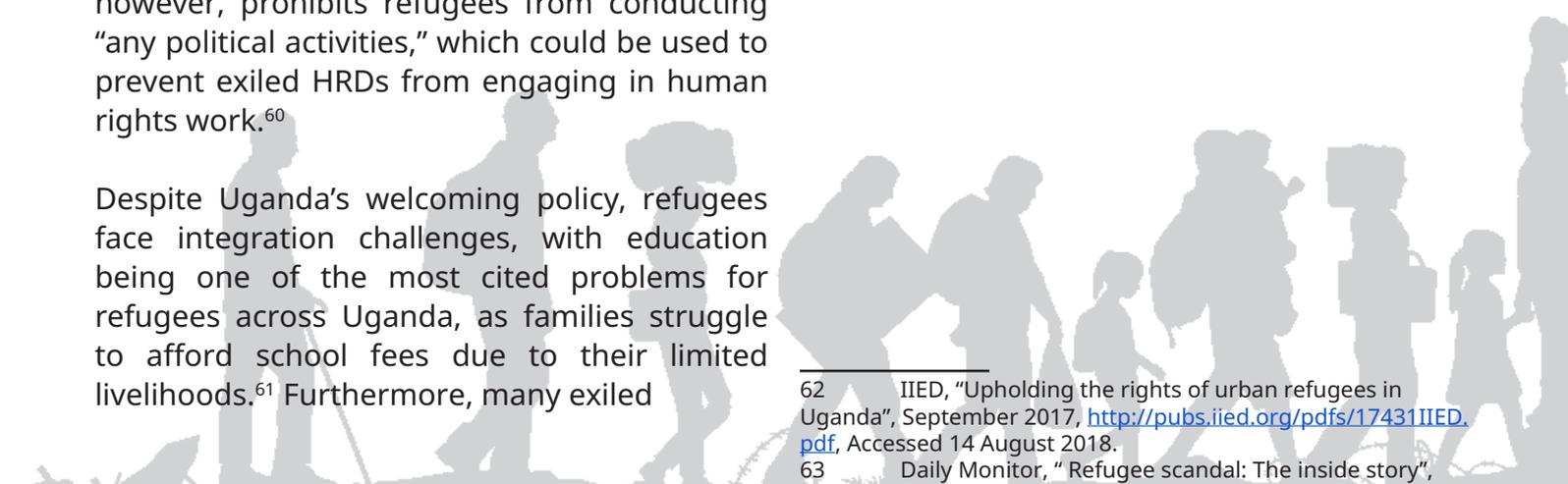
61 REACH, “Uganda: What are refugees’ biggest needs in settlements across Uganda?”, 7 February 2018 <http://www.reach-initiative.org/uganda-what-are-refugees-biggest-needs-in-settlements>, Accessed 14 August 2018.

62 IIED, “Upholding the rights of urban refugees in Uganda”, September 2017, <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17431IIED.pdf>, Accessed 14 August 2018.

63 Daily Monitor, “Refugee scandal: The inside story”, 10 February 2018, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Refugee-scandal-inside-story/688334-4298332-14ke2syz/index.html>, Accessed 21 August 2018.

64 UNHCR, “Refugees from Burundi”, last updated 30 June 2015, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/burundi/location/2023>, Accessed 13 August 2018.

65 Amnesty International, “Burundi: Thousands of refugees under pressure to return despite risk of torture and killings”, 29 September 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/09/burundi-thousands-of-refugees-under-pressure-to-return-despite-risk-of-torture-and-killings/>, Accessed 14 August 2018. A *prima facie* approach implies the recognition of refugee status, often to a group, on the basis of circumstances in the country of origin.



Rwanda

Until the eruption of the crisis in Burundi, Rwanda mainly hosted refugees from the DRC.⁶⁶ With the influx of refugees from Burundi since 2015, Rwanda's refugee population has quickly risen to a total of 152,428, as of May 2018.⁶⁷

Like Uganda, Rwanda is a signatory to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. In 2014, Rwanda updated its refugee policy with the promulgation of Law n°13ter/2014 of 21/05/2014 relating to Refugees, which inscribed into law strong refugee rights, similar to those granted in Uganda.⁶⁸

Contrary to Uganda's settlements, refugees in Rwandan camps depend on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs, but funding shortfalls have affected the extent and quality of support.⁶⁹ Indeed, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Burundian crisis has "the world's least funded refugee response plan."⁷⁰ This has also impacted refugees living in urban areas, including exiled HRDs, as, for example, only refugee children under 12 years of age and people over 59 have access to free healthcare in Kigali.⁷¹

66 UNHCR Rwanda, "Refugees", <http://www.unhcr.org/rw/refugees>, Accessed 14 August 2018.

67 UNHCR Rwanda, "Monthly population statistics", 31 May 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63959>, Accessed 14 August 2018.

68 UNHCR, "The right for refugees to work in Rwanda", 24 July 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/rw/12164-right-work-refugees-rwanda.html>, Accessed 14 August 2018.

69 World Food Programme, "Food rations for refugees in Rwanda are reduced amidst funding shortfalls", 11 January 2018, <https://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/food-rations-refugees-rwanda-are-reduced-amidst-funding-shortfalls>, Accessed 14 August 2018.

70 UNHCR, "Burundi risks becoming a forgotten refugee crisis without support", 6 February 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/2/5a79676a4/burundi-risks-becoming-forgotten-refugee-crisis-support.html>, Accessed 14 August 2018.

71 UNHCR, YWCA Rwanda, CWS, "Mapping of urban

As of June 2018, Rwanda hosted more than 68,000 Burundian refugees, the second largest population after Tanzania.⁷² In February 2016, under accusations of conducting "destabilising activities" in Burundi, the Rwandan government announced that it would relocate Burundian refugees, but later clarified that no forced expulsions would be conducted.⁷³ Nevertheless, Rwanda has been granting *prima facie* refugee status to Burundians since the eruption of the crisis in 2015.⁷⁴

refugees' access to essential services in Rwanda", January 2016, https://cwsglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Rwanda-Urban-Refugee-HH-survey-report_3-Feb-2016.pdf

72 UNHCR, "Burundi situation", last updated 31 July 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/burundi>, Accessed 14 August 2018.

73 Al Jazeera, "Rwanda to relocate Burundian refugees after warnings", 12 February 2016, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/13eKXrwcIVUY3ZdKZbD4s87HC20CSxKQBbbeVXxdpXk/edit>, Accessed 14 August 2018.

74 CRRF Global Digital Portal, "Rwanda", http://www.globalcrrf.org/crrf_country/rwanda/, Accessed 14 August 2018.

Continuing Human Rights Work in Exile

Civil Society Regrouped

As HRDs were forced to flee Burundi as a direct consequence of their work, continuing to engage in the protection and promotion of human rights while in exile is a common desire. Indeed, HRDs often feel a duty to use the relative safety of exile to speak up against human rights abuses, as it is difficult for those who still remain in Burundi to do so without facing reprisals.

Most of the previously existing and well-established human rights organisations that were prevented from working in Burundi have been able to reorganise in exile, as the majority of their members and staff have relocated to either Kigali or Kampala. Working in exile, however, has significantly changed the nature of the work of most exiled CSOs. Unable to provide services to their traditional beneficiaries on the ground (e.g. legal aid, medical support, counselling, etc.) and to directly engage with Burundian institutions, exiled human rights organisations have been forced to narrow their focus on monitoring violations and conducting advocacy at the regional and international levels. Through adaptation and resilience, these CSOs have managed to maintain a network of observers in Burundi who work in secrecy to collect information on the ground, which is then used for reporting and advocacy efforts. Observers may be staff working clandestinely for a CSO or independent contacts.

Exiled journalists and lawyers have been able to continue their human rights activities in a similar fashion. Notable examples are the reorganisation of RPA and the creation of *Radio Inzamba*, which regrouped exiled journalists focusing on informing the world, and when possible the Burundian population itself, about

violations in the country.⁷⁵ Similarly, exiled lawyers have formed the *Collectif des Avocats pour la Défense des Victimes des Crimes de Droits Internationaux au Burundi* (CAVIB), a collective of about 40 people to document and file cases of violations in Burundi with international justice mechanisms.⁷⁶

"We could not give up our engagement in human rights, not only because it is a vocation, but also because crimes against humanity have been committed in Burundi. The HRDs who are still there cannot speak up, so it is the task of HRDs in exile to expose these crimes."⁷⁷

Other initiatives have also flourished, including women groups, youth movements, student clubs, or cultural and art collectives, mostly focusing on the situation in Burundi and the promotion of peace. The HRDs who could not be active in their previous fields, such as trade-unionists or members of CSOs that continue to exist in Burundi, have often kept their human rights vocation but reoriented themselves towards issues that are topical in the context of exile, such as refugee rights. Some HRDs also reported that a few exiled CSOs have been enriched by the engagement of new members, citizens who left Burundi and became engaged in human rights work as a result of the current crisis.

⁷⁵ DefendDefenders, "Don't shoot the messenger! Journalists as human rights defenders in the East and Horn of Africa," October 2017, <https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/DontShootTheMessenger.pdf>

⁷⁶ CAVIB's website can be found at: <http://avocatsdesvictimes.org>

⁷⁷ DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kampala, Uganda, June 2018.



Whereas the majority of HRDs have remained engaged in human rights work at some level, six percent of the interviewed HRDs were forced to abandon their activism due to the precarity of their economic situation.⁷⁸ These HRDs pointed out that economic integration is a requirement for human rights engagement, especially when this work is done on a voluntary basis. Combining human rights work and the struggle for subsistence seemed to be especially challenging for women with young children. In fact, some women HRDs reported having to prioritise taking care of their children as they cannot benefit from the support of family members who remained in Burundi, and do not have enough resources to pay for school fees or babysitting.

"We are in a precarious situation and, with the little money that we have, we need to prioritise rent and food."⁷⁹

Working Remotely in a Legal Limbo

Despite the fact that the great majority of exiled HRDs managed to remain active, their work is rife with challenges, beginning foremost with the uncertainty of their future. Indeed, a common preoccupation that emerged from this study is the difficulty to plan long-term strategies when the duration of exile remains unknown.

"For us in exile there is no certainty of tomorrow, so we cannot plan long term. This way, it is hard to be fully effective in our work."⁸⁰

78 This number is calculated on the basis of the testimonies of in-person interviews with HRDs and online surveys. Volunteering with any human rights organisations (including non-Burundian ones) was considered as a form of continued human rights engagement. The real proportion of exiled HRDs who had to stop their human rights engagement may be higher, as HRDs who are not currently affiliated with a CSO are more difficult to identify.

79 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Butare, Rwanda, June 2018.

80 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kampala, Uganda, June 2018.

More practically, one of the most common obstacles mentioned by HRDs interviewed both in Rwanda and Uganda is the lack of a legal framework for exiled CSOs, which forces Burundian HRDs to work in a situation of semi-legality. Indeed, despite some attempts to register exiled CSOs in host countries, this study has found only two Burundian CSOs that have managed to formally register in Rwanda, likely because of their broader focus on humanitarian issues and conflict prevention. According to HRDs and other stakeholders, the difficulty of registration has a political and diplomatic nature, as the official recognition of organisations labeled as insurgent by Bujumbura would affect the delicate power balance in the region. The Ugandan government does not want to be seen as opposing Bujumbura, a regional ally. Recognition of deregistered CSOs in Rwanda would feed into Burundi's accusation that Rwanda is supporting a rebellion against the current government.

"It would be diplomatically scandalous if the Ugandan interior ministry would recognise an organisation that was banned in Burundi."⁸¹

Caught in this legal limbo, Burundian CSOs in exile often fall into funding gaps, as they cannot satisfy basic donor requirements like having a registration number and bank accounts in the name of the organisation. Several HRDs lamented their partners' lack of understanding of the context of work in exile, but some also pointed out that it is the HRDs' role to explain their situation and continuously look for new partnerships. Most organisations with a long history of human rights work in Burundi seem to have managed to continue receiving funding through their affiliation with international coalitions or regional organisations. However, funding gaps remain particularly wide for

81 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Mbarara, Uganda, May 2018.

fledgling organisations or those created in exile that cannot benefit from previously established networks and reputations. Lack of official recognition also affects HRDs who tried to start refugee-focused initiatives in Mahama and Nakivale camps, who reported facing resistance from camp authorities.

"It is always hard to make donors understand our situation, to convince them that we manage to work even in exile."⁸²

Interviewed HRDs also reported that constraints in organisational funds and in personal resources result in the use of old or low quality equipment, as well as in challenges accessing stable Internet connections. These limitations on digital communication were especially worrisome for HRDs living in Mahama refugee camp due to the camp's isolation and limited access to electricity.

For exiled media and the many CSOs focusing on monitoring and advocacy, the remote nature of their crucial documentation work comes with the huge challenge of information verification. Being removed from the immediate context means that verifying information can be difficult, and many HRDs lament not having direct access to the victims. To improve the reliability of their data, exiled media and CSOs have to cross-check information with different observers in the same area, but this requires more time, funds for communication, and a higher number of observers in the field. This painstaking verification exercise is crucial in the context of Burundi, where the government denies the existence of a crisis and aims to delegitimise any information on violence and abuses in the country, casting it as "fake news" or as part of a "foreign conspiracy."⁸³ In

the words of the ruling CNDD-FDD party, for example, "today, these associations and so-called human rights organisations, with certain personalities that support them in the world, are running fast to make the apology of lies [...] their main mission is to demonise Burundi."⁸⁴ Furthermore, some HRDs reported asking their contacts to verify certain information not only to check the information's reliability, but also to regularly assess the credibility of their sources, as they fear their co-optation by the government.

"When I was in Burundi, I could receive direct testimonies from victims of human rights violations. Now I receive information from other people in Burundi, but verification is extremely challenging."⁸⁵

Another challenge stemming from exile is the difficulty for refugee HRDs to travel outside their host country. As refugees, exiled HRDs should be entitled to Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) issued by their host country. This document allows refugees to travel, similarly to a passport.⁸⁶ In Rwanda, however, the government's announcements that the issuance of CTDs would be increased seems to not have been met in reality, as many of the HRDs interviewed lamented that they still do not have CTDs.⁸⁷ In Uganda, HRDs who arrived after the revocation of *prima facie* refugee status for Burundians may face delays in the assessment of their asylum application, and thus in the possibility of receiving CTDs. In practice, many HRDs continue to use their

84 CNDD-FDD, "Communiqué n.013/2016 du parti CNDD-FDD du 26 Juillet 2016", 3 August 2016, <http://cndd-fdd.org/2016/08/03/communique-no-0132016-du-parti-cndd-fdd-du-26-juillet-2016/>, Accessed 22 August 2018.

85 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian lawyer in exile in Kampala, Uganda, June 2018.

86 UNHCR, "Note on travel documents for refugees ES/SCP/10", 30 August 1978, <http://www.unhcr.org/excom/scip/3ae68cce14/note-travel-documents-refugees.html>, Accessed 9 August 2018.

87 "Refugees to get machine readable travel documents", The New Times, 30 January 2018, <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/228637>, Accessed 22 August 2018.

82 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kigali, Rwanda, June 2018.

83 Reports Without Borders, "Fake News: government weapon for destroying independent media", 7 March 2017, <https://rsf.org/en/news/fake-news-government-weapon-destroying-independent-media>, Accessed 21 August 2018.



Burundian passports, running the risk of having issues with their asylum applications or refugee status, but they will be unable to travel once these passports expire. Those who obtained CTDs also reported facing issues with being granted visas for countries both within and outside the African continent, because of their refugee status. If refugees in the EAC member states are to have the same rights as nationals, they should not require visas to travel to another EAC member state, as it the case for EAC citizens. However, Burundian HRDs in exile reported not only being required visas by some EAC countries but also struggling to obtain them.⁸⁸ The same situation prevails for those who seek to travel to the EU, including Switzerland, where the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) and other human rights bodies and mechanisms sit. For these reasons, many interviewed HRDs, both in Uganda and in Rwanda, reported that they had to miss advocacy missions, trainings, and networking opportunities due to constraints on their mobility.

88 The Citizen, "You don't need passport to travel all over East Africa", 21 February 2014, <http://www.thecitizen.co.tz/News/You-don-t-need-passport-to-travel-all-over-East-Africa/1840340-2215850-10m38g4/index.html>, Accessed 21 August 2018.





"If I speak about human rights, bad governance, education, health, and peace, people say that I am doing politics. This is a way to discourage engagement. A politician is someone who aims to conquer political power; I am not running for president."⁸⁷

Some of the interviewed HRDs reported that political involvement was at times cited by donors as a reason to deny funding, in addition to the lack of legal framework for exiled CSOs. This raises the question of where to draw the line between political engagement and human rights work, especially for HRDs who are engaged in the defence of democratic values, and free and fair elections, irrespective of the candidates or parties running.

In Burundi, where the creation of political parties is extremely difficult, civil society has often been used as a space to express discontent at government conduct, by HRDs and political opponents alike.⁹⁰ At the same time, the Burundian government has long propagated a narrative that conflates civil society and political opposition. For example, when the *Ligue ITEKA* was created in 1990, the government countered it with the creation of its own *Ligue Sonera*.⁹¹

This discourse equating civil society and opposition has been key to the government's strategy of delegitimising civil society since the 2015 crisis, as HRDs have been accused of supporting the failed coup of May 2015. In the words of the CNDD-FDD ruling party, "the so-called human rights organisations [...] have since 2014 expressed their unwavering support for the authors of the 13 May 2015 *putsch* against the democratically elected institutions."⁹²

According to a report by the *Fédération internationale des droits de l'homme* (FIDH), the Burundian government has gone so far as hosting on national television alleged "repentant rebels" from the opposition (sometimes discovered to be SNR agents) testifying on the collaboration between human rights NGOs and armed groups.⁹³

This discourse has had detrimental impacts on the lives of HRDs, as many of the interviewees reported that their persecution started after they were accused of supporting the coup. Some HRDs also mentioned that they believe their struggle to access funding is also linked to potential partners fearing to associate with individuals that have been publicly labelled as "*putschists*" by the Burundian government.

Before and after the crisis in 2015, HRDs conducted work to expose harassment, torture, and enforced disappearances of opposition figures, but this has been done on the basis of the latter's status as victims of human rights violations, rather than in support of their political ideals.⁹⁴ Thus, thinking critically about the relations between HRDs and politics is not only a philosophical exercise but a necessary reflection to ensure that support for human rights is well-placed while avoiding falling into the trap of the government's discrediting tactics.

fdd.org/2016/08/03/communique-no-0132016-du-parti-cndd-fdd-du-26-juillet-2016/, Accessed 22 August 2018.

⁹³ FIDH and Ligue Iteka, "Repression and genocidal dynamics in Burundi", November 2016, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/burundi_report_english-2.pdf

⁹⁴ DefendDefenders, "2015: Burundi at a turning point. Human rights defenders working in the context of elections", January 2015, <https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/burundi-2015-en.pdf>

⁸⁹ DefendDefenders interview with an HRD in exile in Kigali, Rwanda, July 2018.

⁹⁰ "L'évolution de la société civile au Burundi", *l'Afrique des grands lacs*, Annuaire 2005-2006, <http://www.ua.ac.be/objs/00151014.pdf>

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² CNDD-FDD, "Communiqué n.013/2016 du parti CNDD-FDD du 26 juillet 2016", 3 August 2016, <http://cndd->

Security in Exile

Living in Fear

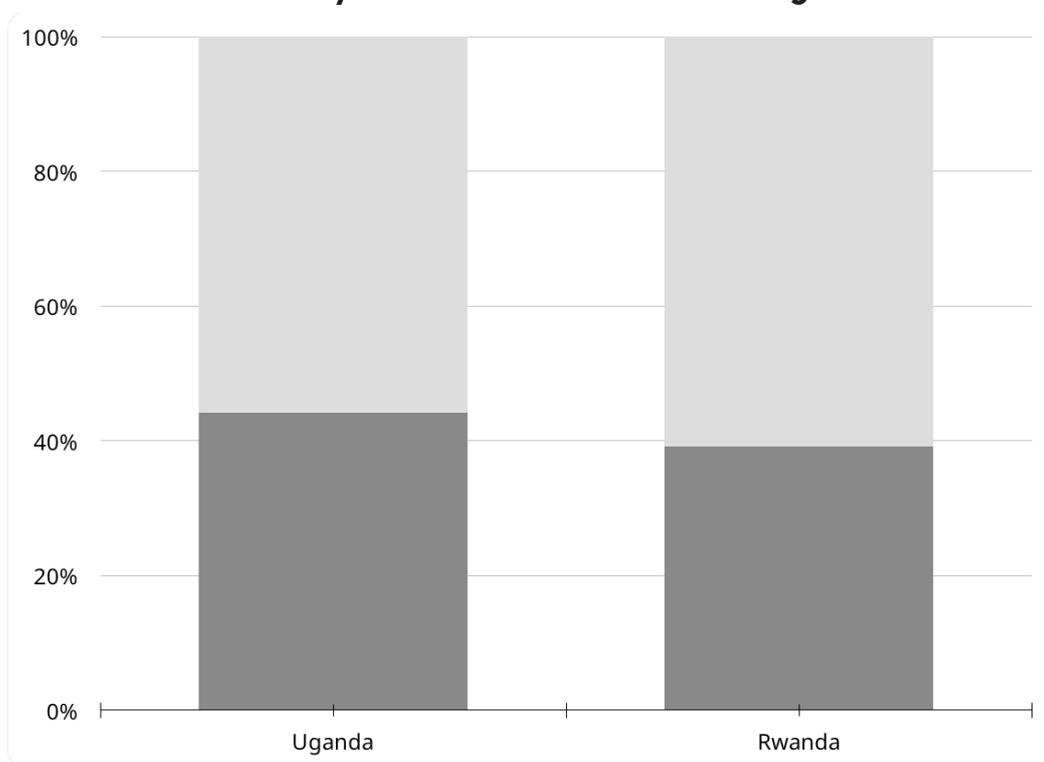
Security is a major concern for exiled HRDs, as they fear that *Imbonerakure* and SNR agents can follow and hurt them in exile. Approximately 40 percent of the HRDs interviewed both in Rwanda and in Uganda reported some form of security incident while in exile, which they believe to be linked to their human rights work.⁹⁵ More than ten HRDs also reported cases of reprisals against their properties and their family members in Burundi. This is particularly the case for journalists or the most outspoken HRDs, whose families have been intimidated in order to indirectly silence them. However, the link between security incidents and HRDs' human rights work is at times difficult to verify.

"Once, I spoke on the radio and my brother called me saying: 'you have to stop! You left but we stayed and they can still cut our heads off.' I cannot speak in public anymore."⁹⁶

As one HRD pointed out, the fear of being targeted may affect HRDs' ability to draw the line between targeted attacks and incidents due to general insecurity.

Proportionally to the number of HRDs in exile interviewed in each country, security incidents seem to be slightly more common in Uganda than in Rwanda, with 44 percent of HRDs in Uganda reporting some kind of security incident, as opposed to 39 percent in Rwanda.

Security Incidents in Rwanda vs. Uganda



⁹⁵ A security incident is defined as an event that can expose HRDs or their organisations to danger. The security incidents considered here thus include a wide range of events, from theft of devices potentially aimed at discovering information, to direct physical assault.

⁹⁶ DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian journalist in exile in Kigali, Rwanda, July 2018.



With very few exceptions, the security incidents reported in Rwanda did not involve physical encounters or attacks, as they mainly took the form of intimidating messages by phone or social media, and thefts. However, the possibility of poisoning was repeatedly mentioned by HRDs in Rwanda, following a series of deaths among the Burundian refugee population considered to be suspicious. In Mahama refugee camp, one HRD reported being informed that an attack against him was stopped by police, while other HRDs lamented the alleged widespread presence of *Imbonerakure* members in the camp due to its proximity to Burundi. This suspicion has also had adverse effects on HRDs, with at least one facing accusations of being an *Imbonerakure*.

The security incidents reported by HRDs in Uganda seem to encompass more direct threats, including physical encounters. A significant number of HRDs who reported security incidents said they had met people they believe to be agents of the Burundian government following them, photographing them, or visiting their homes uninvited. These incidents often prompted HRDs to repeatedly change their place of residence. For example, an HRD reported receiving a visit by people posing as Congolese Jehovah's Witnesses, whom he recognised as Burundians. Another HRD claimed that he was purposefully pushed in the middle of the road by a man who immediately escaped on a motorbike. Security incidents of particular gravity were reported in Nakivale refugee settlement, where four HRDs were physically attacked, including one allegedly with a machete.

One of the main differences observed between exile in Rwanda and Uganda is how HRDs perceive their own security. In Rwanda, HRDs generally reported feeling that they can count on the protection of national security services and that police diligently follow up on reported incidents. Conversely, in Uganda, HRDs' feeling of insecurity seems to be amplified by a fear

of general criminality and a lack of confidence in the police due to corruption and weak political will to deal with incidents involving the Burundian regime. This feeling of insecurity is particularly prominent in Nakivale, where Burundian refugees in general lament the presence of *Imbonerakure* in the camp along with the laxity of the Ugandan police.⁹⁷

"Given the relations between Rwanda and Burundi and the level of organisation in Rwanda, it is hard for the Bujumbura regime to pursue its objectives in Rwanda. But we need to always remain vigilant."⁹⁸

Regardless of their current country of residence, almost all the exiled Burundian HRDs interviewed stressed the importance of always being vigilant. While 40 percent of the interviewed HRDs reported some kind of security incident, more than 70 percent fear the possibility of being targeted in exile. In most cases, this fear has not vanished with time, but HRDs seem to have learnt to live with their fears and have adopted basic measures for their personal safety and security. Almost all interviewed HRDs, for example, stated that they strongly limit interactions with other Burundian refugees outside their circle of known fellow HRDs, rarely share their address or phone number, and often hide their profession from people they do not know.

"It is difficult to say that we are safe. This country is frequented by agents of the regime that forced us into exile, and we can be targets of attacks at any time."⁹⁹

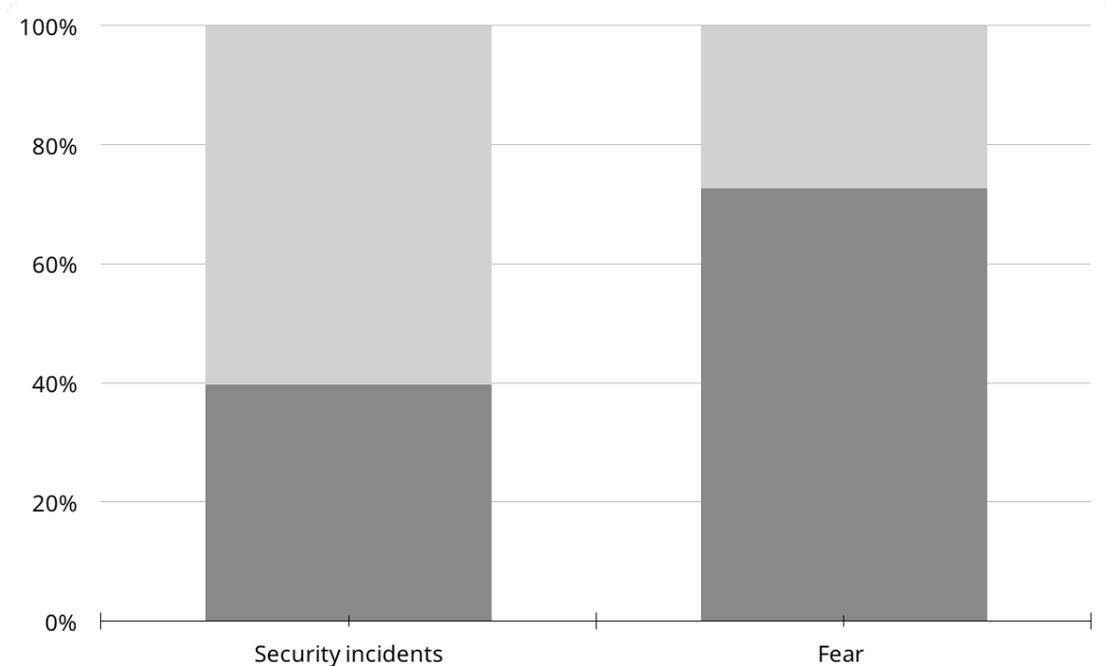
97 International Refugees Rights Initiative, "There is no security here": Fears of Burundian refugees in a Ugandan refugee settlement", 16 March 2018, <http://refugee-rights.org/there-is-no-security/>, Accessed 15 August 2018.

98 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kigali, Rwanda, May 2018.

99 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kampala, Uganda, May 2018.



Security Incidents in Exile vs. Fear of Being Targeted



Security Challenges for Exiled CSOs

At the organisational level, despite the protractedness of exile and HRDs' fears, security mechanisms are often limited. As they work in a legal limbo, CSOs try to keep a low profile in their host country. For example, some members of CSOs that managed to open an informal office, reported that they worry about generating suspicion among their neighbours, and thus limit the amount of staff that can visit the office at once, which can impact efficiency and coordination efforts. Despite these basic precautions, however, none of the CSOs subject to this study have concrete security plans adapted to their activities in exile.

A major challenge of the remote documentation work done by exiled Burundian CSOs is also the security of observers. Several HRDs expressed preoccupation for the security of their sources, coupled with a sense of helplessness to intervene in case their monitoring work is revealed. Indeed, all the CSOs participating in this research did not have assistance mechanisms in place to support collaborators in case of emergency. When risks did arise, members often came together in solidarity to give themselves mutual assistance or turned

to protection partners like DefendDefenders. In other words, exiled Burundian CSOs tend to have a reactive rather than preventative approach to security.

"If informants are found to be collaborating with a CSO in exile, the sanction will be death or prison – and we cannot do anything to help them."¹⁰⁰

In addition, the remote nature of the work of most exiled CSOs increases the importance of digital security, due to the frequent exchange of sensitive information between dispersed HRDs. As in the case of physical security, some CSOs implement basic digital security practices, such as frequently deleting messages or changing phone numbers. However, guidelines for digital security at the organisational level are often missing, and knowledge often remains with individual HRDs, and is not spread evenly across whole organisations. Ensuring that observers on the ground are up to speed in terms of digital security is particularly challenging due to the context of secrecy in which they operate.

¹⁰⁰ DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Nyamata, Rwanda, June 2018.

Recognising gaps in their security, some HRDs expressed the need for developing capacity in physical and digital security management. This was especially the case for newer organisations and those founded in exile, which lack experience in managing threats. Most HRDs seem to agree that the lack of security mechanisms, including emergency protocols and security equipments such as CCTV cameras for physical premises, is a consequence of their struggle to raise funds and their resulting need to strictly prioritise activities. Lack of funding further influences security for CSOs that do not have physical premises, as affiliated HRDs may have to access Internet connection from public spaces where they are more vulnerable to both digital and physical threats.

101 Embassy of the Republic of Uganda in Bujumbura, Burundi, "Bilateral relations", 9 December 2015, <https://bujumbura.mofa.go.ug/data/mmenu/3/Bilateral-Relations.html>, Accessed 22 August 2018.

102 International Crisis Group, "The African Union and the Burundi Crisis: Ambition versus Reality", Crisis Group Africa Briefing n.122, 28 September 2016 <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b122-the-african-union-and-the-burundi-crisis-ambition-versus-reality.pdf>

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 SE-Oxford Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development; "The origin and persistence of state fragility in Burundi", April 2018, <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Burundi-report-v2.pdf>

106 Ibid.

107 International Crisis Group, "The political and security crisis in Burundi", <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/political-and-security-crisis-burundi>, Accessed 22 August 2018.

108 Ibid.

109 International Crisis Group, "The African Union and the Burundi Crisis: Ambition versus Reality", Crisis Group Africa Briefing n.122, 28 September 2016, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b122-the-african-union-and-the-burundi-crisis-ambition-versus-reality.pdf>

The Political and Diplomatic Landscape

Burundi - Uganda

Burundi and Uganda are regional allies with good diplomatic relations and several cooperation agreements in a variety of fields ranging from trade to education.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni was one of the leaders who supported the settlement that brought President Nkurunziza to power in 2005 after twelve years of civil war.¹⁰² When the crisis erupted in Burundi in 2015, President Museveni, who was then completing his fourth term in office and preparing a fifth, did not condemn President Nkurunziza's bid for a third mandate.¹⁰³

In July 2016, President Museveni was appointed chief negotiator in the EAC-led inter-Burundian dialogue aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the crisis in Burundi. The EAC-led process, however, has made little progress, and President Museveni has been criticised for his half-hearted commitment.¹⁰⁴

Burundi - Rwanda

Burundi and Rwanda have strong linguistic and cultural similarities, and they were ruled as one territory, Ruanda-Urundi, during the colonial period, when differences between Hutus and Tutsis were reshaped and institutionalised for political purposes.¹⁰⁵ After independence, Burundi was mostly ruled by Tutsi politicians, while power in Rwanda was held by Hutu groups. Consequently, when Hutus were persecuted in Burundi, they fled to Rwanda, while Tutsis of Rwanda sought refuge in Burundi during the Rwandan Genocide.¹⁰⁶ The presence of large numbers of their refugees in the neighbouring territory was perceived as a threat by both countries, resulting in reciprocal antagonism. With the 2015 crisis and the new exodus of refugees from Burundi to Rwanda, tensions have resurfaced. On one hand, Rwanda accuses Bujumbura of tolerating the presence of Rwandan anti-government armed militias, which may still include some genocidaires.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, Burundi blames Rwanda for recruiting and training Burundian refugees for armed rebellion.¹⁰⁸ Rwandan President Paul Kagame was one of the few regional leaders to publicly oppose President Nkurunziza's third mandate in 2015, and the crisis has led to serious tensions between the two countries, whose relations have since deteriorated.¹⁰⁹

A Precarious Socio-Economic Context

The Arduous Step to Self-Sufficiency

The ability of HRDs to integrate socially and economically in their host country is of crucial importance, as socio-economic integration influences all aspects of their lives, including their security and capacity to effectively engage in human rights activities.

When they were forced out of Burundi, many HRDs had to sell their belongings and often exhausted their savings to survive in the initial period of exile. With time, some exiled HRDs have managed to be employed by continuing to work for their respective CSOs, continuing their profession (e.g. journalists), or doing small jobs. In most cases, the HRDs interviewed judged their economic situation as being very difficult. Indeed, with exile, most HRDs have experienced a significant drop in their standard of living, often going from being breadwinners of their families to being dependant on the financial support of family members and friends. Some women with young children highlighted having specific challenges as they do not have family members to support them in the caretaking of children, nor the resources to pay for domestic help, thus remaining excluded from professional opportunities and human rights activities.

Administrative issues were often cited as barriers to economic integration by the interviewed HRDs. Despite the fact that work harmonisation is one of the pillars of the establishment of the EAC, the recognition of academic and professional qualifications seems to prevent some Burundian HRDs from continuing their professions in their host countries, which are EAC member states.¹¹⁰ Being unable to practice their profession for years can have a long-term negative effect on

HRDs' future employability, especially for young HRDs. Professional harmonisation seems to be a particular preoccupation for lawyers in exile both in Uganda and in Rwanda, as they are required to go through long and expensive studies and administrative procedures in order to be integrated within the bar association of the host country. Even the very few lawyers who managed to become part of the Rwanda Bar Association highlighted that they struggle to find enough clients, as the local population prefers Rwandan lawyers.

"As an HRD and mother in exile, I have specific challenges linked to my situation. In Burundi I was able to pay for a caretaker for my children, but here this is not possible anymore."¹¹¹

In Uganda, as HRDs tended to choose to settle in the country because of economic opportunities, many have developed business ideas that they would like to implement, but stated that they lack the necessary startup capital. The HRDs who did start businesses had often negative experiences. Scarce startup capital was the most cited reason for lack of growth or business failure, along with discrimination in the marketplace, language barriers, and difficult relations with business partners.

Overall, the expectations of the HRDs who chose Uganda for its economic potential have been unmet. While a few HRDs reported feeling socially integrated in the multicultural Ugandan society, language is often cited as a significant barrier to social integration in Uganda. Another obstacle to social integration in Uganda mentioned by some HRDs, especially single men, is that they tend to be mistaken

¹¹⁰ Article 11, Protocol on the establishment of the East African Community common market (2012), <http://eacj.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Common-Market-Protocol.pdf>

¹¹¹ DefendDefenders interview with an HRD in exile in Huye, Rwanda, June 2018.



for Rwandans, invoking suspicion because of alleged ties between the Rwandan military and the Ugandan government. This suspicion was particularly worrying for HRDs during electoral periods in Uganda.

"The information we had before coming was very encouraging on the possibilities for economic integration, but we found things to be more complicated than we thought."¹¹²

In Rwanda, business as well as employment opportunities are even scarcer, due to strict regulations and the lack of an informal economy like that of Uganda and Burundi. Journalists seem to be an exception, as some have managed to be integrated within Rwandan media organisations. Some HRDs also pointed out that Rwanda has a closed system where it is nearly impossible to access important professional or business opportunities without a strong local network. HRDs in Kigali also lamented the high cost of living in the capital and their struggle to access expensive medical care as refugees aged 12 to 59 are not covered by free healthcare in Kigali.¹¹³ If economic integration is harder in Rwanda than in Uganda, the opposite can be said for social integration. Indeed, most HRDs in Rwanda, with very few exceptions, felt socially integrated thanks to cultural and linguistic similarities.

It is in the refugee camps, both in Rwanda and in Uganda, that Burundian HRDs seem to face the harshest socio-economic conditions. Indeed, despite the assistance provided by humanitarian organisations, HRDs living in refugee camps lack the economic opportunities of urban centres. All the HRDs interviewed in Mahama refugee camp are in a situation of

full dependency on aid, and many volunteer in organisations active in the camp to remain engaged and to use their limited volunteer stipend to complement meagre food rations.¹¹⁴

"Living by stretching the hand for a few grains of maize is degrading for those who used to feed their families."¹¹⁵

In light of the systematic civil society crackdown that has been occurring in Burundi since 2015, several HRDs interviewed have received emergency assistance through protection mechanisms, aimed at supporting them in their process of relocating from Burundi and adapting to their host country. HRDs stressed the importance of this emergency assistance for their survival, but also highlighted the challenge of transitioning between assistance and self-sufficiency. For example, one HRD reported that, when his four-month emergency support ended, he was forced to sell the last plot of land and cow that he still had in Burundi, and he was unable to pay for medical treatment and school fees for his children for more than 18 months, until he was able to join the staff of a Burundian CSO in exile. Indeed, emergency assistance is often time-bound and focused on supporting HRDs upon arrival, and thus often insufficient for HRDs grappling with the uncertainty of protracted exile.

This gap between highly needed emergency assistance and long-term economic integration shows the need to include elements of resilience in emergency support, and to improve coordination between protection, humanitarian, and refugee organisations in order to ensure a long-term impact on the lives of HRDs who face protracted exile.

112 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kampala, Uganda, May 2018.

113 UNHCR, YWCA Rwanda, CWS, "Mapping of urban refugees' access to essential services in Rwanda", January 2016, https://cwsglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Rwanda-Urban-Refugee-HH-survey-report_3-Feb-2016.pdf, Accessed 14 August 2018.

114 According to all the HRDs interviewed who are volunteering in Mahama camp, as well as representatives of the refugee community in Rwanda, the contribution to volunteers in the camp is fixed at 18,000 Rwandan Francs (approximately US\$ 20) a month.

115 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Mahama refugee camp, Rwanda, June 2018.

"In Burundi we can wake up one morning, take a table and put it on the side of the street with some tomatoes and onions on sale. But in Rwanda this is impossible."¹¹⁶

The Link Between Economic Factors, Security, and Human Rights Work

The precarious economic situation of exiled HRDs can have a negative impact on their security. Indeed, many HRDs reported having to trade security for economic survival, as they are forced to live in collective housing or do small jobs that require them to work late at night, exposing them to increased security risks. For example, one HRD reported that she was forced to move to Nakivale refugee camp after having settled in Kampala with her family, as she was unable to sustain her life in the capital. Once in Nakivale, however, she was victim of two attacks, which she believes to be targeted because the family had hardly any belonging to be stolen. Because of these security threats, she decided to move back to Kampala, where it is easier to hide her identity, but her family lives in poverty and she remains traumatised by the attacks.

"When the assistance ended, I experienced very difficult moments."¹¹⁷

Economic factors may also have an impact on CSOs' ability to continue their work effectively. Some HRDs with coordinating roles within Burundian CSOs worried about the future of their organisations, as they observed that exiled HRDs have started to leave Kigali and Kampala for rural areas where life is cheaper. Similarly, it has been reported that HRDs have moved, or want to move, to Europe or other western countries where they feel that they will have more economic opportunities, and where their security would be better ensured.

¹¹⁶ DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kigali, Rwanda, July 2018.

¹¹⁷ DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kampala, Uganda, May 2018.

Being farther away from their fellow HRDs, whether in remote areas or outside the African continent, and having to focus on economic needs, these HRDs may reduce their involvement in human rights activities. In addition, HRDs reported that some of their fellow HRDs in exile may be considering going back to Burundi, as they see no way forward for their future in exile. Returning to Burundi would likely expose them to threats and reprisals, and HRDs in exile fear that returnees may be co-opted by authorities to leak sensitive information about exiled HRDs and CSOs. This shows the importance of the fulfilment of basic economic needs in order for HRDs to remain close to their colleagues in their current host countries, and, consequently, in order for exiled CSOs to continue to be dynamic in their struggle for human rights in Burundi.

"I fear that the Burundian civil society is on the way to decomposition. Thankfully people don't take the boat across the Mediterranean, but if they manage to get on a plane to Europe, they may not come back. There they have to do small jobs to survive, and will stop being engaged."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kigali, Rwanda, July 2018.



The Psychological Impact of Protracted Exile

Between Trauma, Despair, and Adaptation

Witnessing or being victim of human rights violations during Burundi's crisis, experiencing threats, arrest, and at times torture or ill-treatment, and fleeing one's country take a toll on HRDs' psychological wellbeing. Some of the interviewed HRDs reported suffering from acute stress upon arrival in their host country, as they left Burundi without the time to fully appreciate the consequences of their decision to flee and continued to fear for their security. For example, some HRDs reported spending the first weeks in exile in hiding without being able to speak or get out of bed. One HRD reported constantly considering going back to Burundi, which he recognised as a way of committing suicide.

"Suddenly leaving your country, abandoning all your projects, your family, your studies... this caused a huge emotional shock for me when I arrived in exile. I did not imagine that life could crumble like this."¹¹⁹

With time, several HRDs have adapted to their situation, managing to develop personal strategies to control their fears and deal with stress and anxiety, such as sporting or praying. Many HRDs stressed that the ability to continue their human rights work was extremely beneficial to their psychological state, as they could keep themselves busy, share experiences with fellow HRDs, and find a purpose for their exile. However, some HRDs mentioned that the lack of resources to distract themselves or to provide entertainment for their children represent a barrier for psychological adaptation.

119 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian lawyer in exile in Kampala, Uganda, May 2018.

The struggles of protracted exile can generate new sources of psychological stress and anxiety. Indeed, some of the interviewed HRDs reported feeling stressed and in despair as a consequence of the precariousness of their economic situation and the continued uncertainty of their future. This seems to be particularly difficult for HRDs who experienced a significant change in their standard of living and for young professionals who had promising plans for their future when the crisis erupted, such as marriage or career development.

"Stress is a permanent condition of life in exile. Everytime my kids are kicked out of school because of delays in the payment of school fees, I am hugely affected. The dependency on other people makes me despair."¹²⁰

Another factor that affects HRDs psychologically, and worsens with protracted exile, is distance from their family. Due to economic necessity and other considerations, most exiled HRDs have left family members, sometimes even their partners and children, in Burundi, and have not been able to see them for years. Furthermore, HRDs reported that it can be dangerous for family members to visit them in exile, especially in Rwanda, as they can be accused of "supporting rebels" upon their return. In this context, HRDs lamented being unable to visit ill parents or attend funerals. One HRD reported that he has never seen his child, who was born in Burundi after his exile, as the Burundian administration refuses to issue the child's travel documents. He interpreted the denial of the child's documents as a way for the Burundian regime to continue harassing him on an emotional level.

120 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kampala, Uganda, May 2018.



Gaps in Psychosocial Support Mechanisms

Approximately 30 percent of the HRDs interviewed expressed a need for professional psychological support of some kind, for themselves or for a close member of their family. At the same time, some HRDs stated that many exiled Burundians may not recognise or admit a need for psychological support, because mental health issues tend to be stigmatised in Burundian culture. The need for psychological support may therefore be much higher. However, only two of the HRDs interviewed said that they benefited from professional psychological support. Others identified lack of resources and access to free services as reasons for not having benefited from psychological support. Some HRDs who have managed to adapt with time wished they had had access to this kind of assistance upon arrival.

A few HRDs who recognised themselves as suffering from psychological issues did not believe in the benefit of counselling, stress management, or artistic therapy, as they see a change in their situation as the only solution for their renewed mental wellbeing. Yet, the HRDs who were familiar with concepts of psychology or stress management before exile often stated that this knowledge was useful in helping them to cope with trauma and the uncertainty of life in exile.

With the exception of one CSO currently based in Rwanda, no exiled Burundian CSO has established formal mechanisms for psychological support for staff or beneficiaries. However, some organisations developed ways of indirectly having a positive impact on the psychological wellbeing of their members, through sport clubs or informal group therapy sessions. Most HRDs saw the establishment of psychological support mechanisms within their CSOs as beneficial, and cited funding constraints as the main reason for their inexistence.

"The last time I saw my children was three years ago. Can you imagine how it feels for a mother, when your children are sick, and you cannot do anything?"¹²¹

Several HRDs also expressed the desire to strengthen their own capacity in stress management and other psychosocial support mechanisms in order to be able to better deal with the psychological needs of beneficiaries, refugees, and fellow HRDs. This was particularly the case for HRDs living in refugee camps, who identified a significant need for psychological support among the refugee population in general. While psychological support mechanisms tend to exist in refugee camps, HRDs lamented that they often have limited reach. One HRD living in Nakivale stated that an informal study he conducted in collaboration with other psychologist refugees in the camp found that about 70 percent of the Burundian refugee population in the settlement are victims of trauma.¹²²

"I fear that even if the government changes in Burundi, I will not hurry back. Those who hurt us will not simply leave."¹²³

121 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian journalist in exile in Kigali, Rwanda, July 2018.

122 DefendDefenders was not able to verify the methodology and results of this informal study.

123 DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Kampala, Uganda, June 2018.



An Uncertain Future

Burundian HRDs in exile struggle to imagine their own future. Most HRDs stressed that their dream is to return to Burundi as soon as the situation will allow them to. Yet, many do not expect this dream to quickly materialise, as they interpret the current situation in Burundi as gradually worsening for HRDs. The climate of fear that characterised the constitutional referendum of May 2018 was often mentioned as a sign that the end of exile is nowhere near. Many HRDs also remain skeptical that President Nkurunziza's announcement that his mandate will end in 2020 will result in positive change. Indeed, several HRDs stressed that cosmetic changes will not be enough for them to feel safe enough to go back to Burundi.

Despite this common understanding that exile will continue to be protracted, only very few HRDs have reached a level of integration that allows them to see themselves in their host country long-term. Those who have, are often HRDs with children who are well integrated in the local school system or those who have managed to start an income-generating activity.

Due to insecurity and economic precariousness, some HRDs stated that they would like to relocate to a third country while they wait for the situation in Burundi to improve. Relocation was especially mentioned by HRDs who had serious security incidents, and those who live in refugee camps. A specific situation emerged in Mahama, where some of the HRDs were previously living in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within Burundi, coming from regions that have historically been affected by cycles of ethnic violence. These HRDs wished for relocation as they want to see an end to their repeated displacement in camps.

"Trying to register your organisation outside Burundi is also hard because it would mean admitting that we are not going back, that exile is here to stay."¹²⁴

Despite the great number of HRDs hoping for relocation, only very few seem to have a clear idea of where they would like to go or have tried to start a resettlement process. The few who did file a resettlement case with the relevant national authorities and UNHCR complained about the lack of follow-up.

Other HRDs stressed the importance of staying within the East African region in order to remain connected to the situation in Burundi as well as with other HRDs in exile. These HRDs feel that the value of their human rights work would be diminished the farther they are from Burundi, and stressed the importance of support mechanisms that can stabilise HRDs' lives in the region as the best way to save Burundian civil society from total disintegration. In this context, some HRDs emphasised the importance of the development of youth-centered initiatives to form a generation of Burundians who can ensure that human rights values are central in the Burundian society of tomorrow.

Overall, three years after the eruption of the Burundian crisis, most exiled HRDs appear to still be in limbo. Not knowing how long it will take to resolve the crisis in Burundi creates complex challenges for HRDs attempting to plan for their professional and personal future, as well as for the future of their organisations.

¹²⁴ DefendDefenders interview with a Burundian HRD in exile in Europe, June 2018.

Conclusion

If the aim of the Burundian regime in threatening HRDs was to silence their criticism, it has underestimated their resilience. The overwhelming majority of HRDs who have been driven into exile since the outbreak of the crisis in 2015 remain active, tirelessly monitoring and exposing the human rights violations and abuses that continue to be committed in Burundi. Their strenuous work allows Burundians outside and within the country, fellow HRDs, and the international community to know what is happening in the country. It gives victims of violations the assurance that the abuses they experienced will not be forgotten. It keeps alive the human rights values that are vital for lasting peace in the country.

However, many of the challenges identified by DefendDefenders' 2016 report "Exiled and in Limbo" remain relevant for Burundian HRDs in protracted exile in Rwanda and Uganda.¹²⁵ Burundian CSOs continue to work in a legal limbo that often pushes them into funding gaps. The remote nature of work in exile also creates new challenges for HRDs, such as verifying information and ensuring the security of observers. In this context, it is crucial for HRDs to proactively seek new partnerships and explain their working environment, while donors should develop flexible approaches to support the vital work of exiled CSOs. Burundian HRDs in exile should also aim to learn from the experiences of other HRDs who have managed to circumvent similar challenges, such as Sudanese organisations that successfully operate in Kampala, or groups working on sexual orientation and gender identity issues that manage to obtain funding

without legal recognition.

In addition, despite varying degrees of security in Uganda and Rwanda, exiled HRDs continue to live in fear of persecution by infiltrated *Imbonerakure* and SNR agents. Yet, Burundian CSOs in exile tend to lack well-rounded security plans. This highlights a need to improve the capacity of exiled CSOs in digital and physical security, and to think of creative ways to share new knowledge with observers on the ground. Three years after the beginning of their exodus from Burundi, the socio-economic situation of many exiled HRDs has not improved, and the step between assistance and self-sufficiency remains a particularly difficult one. This emphasises the need for organisations that provide emergency support to integrate a long-term perspective in their emergency interventions to help HRDs become self-sustainable in exile. Indeed, a successful socio-economic integration can help diminish HRDs' sense of despair in the face of protracted exile, and can prevent them from leaving the East African region and abandoning their human rights work.

There is no fixed date for the end of exile for the ever-growing number of HRDs driven out of Burundi. It is thus necessary to continue to keep a spotlight on the human rights situation in the country and to find innovative ways to continue to support HRDs in their situation of protracted exile. It is a critical time to prevent despair from disintegrating Burundian civil society and to ensure that HRDs persevere in their activism to expose violations and promote human rights in Burundi.

¹²⁵ DefendDefenders, "Exiled and in limbo: Support mechanisms for human rights defenders in exile in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda", June 2016, <https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ExiledandinLimboSept2017.pdf>



Recommendations

To Burundian human rights defenders and civil society organisations in exile

- Make continuous efforts to foster understanding of the specificities of work in exile among partners and donors, including clarifying limitations and increasing the visibility of the impact of the human rights work conducted in exile;
- Improve fundraising capacity and understanding of donors' limitations, actively seek to diversify sources of funding, and reflect on ways to foster organisational sustainability;
- Adapt organisational structures and activities to the context of exile and the legal requirements of the host country, by learning from the experience of other human rights organisations and establishing platforms for knowledge sharing;
- Develop a preventative rather than reactive approach to physical and digital security, through the development of security plans adapted to the context of exile, as well as contingency plans and emergency mechanisms for the protection of observers at risk;
- Develop ways to share newly acquired knowledge with observers on the ground, tailored to their working and security context; and
- Develop mechanisms to enhance the psychological wellbeing of human rights defenders, and whenever relevant, conduct a psychological needs assessment for beneficiaries.

To international non-governmental organisations

- Develop and strengthen tailored programmes for the mid to long term support of exiled civil society organisations in order to enable the continuation of their human rights work, and to provide exiled human rights defenders with opportunities for employment and continued engagement;
- Develop and strengthen partnerships to increase coordination among protection, human rights, and refugee support mechanisms for an integrated approach to the support of human rights defenders in protracted exile to help them transitioning from emergency assistance to self-sufficiency;
- Ensure that new human rights initiatives founded in exile have the necessary support to develop and channel the commitment of refugees who want to engage in human rights activities; and
- In collaboration with exiled civil society organisations, conduct a psychosocial support needs assessment for human rights defenders in exile, and shape mechanisms for psychosocial support accordingly.



To Donors

- Develop flexible approaches to ensure that exiled civil society organisations can continue their human rights work by adapting funding and reporting requirements to the specific context of work in exile;
- Support mid and long term programmes to enhance the work of exiled civil society organisations and human rights defenders in a situation of protracted exile, as well as programmes aimed at the empowerment and integration of exiled human rights defenders;
- Continuously seek to expand the network of partners and beneficiaries, including new human rights initiatives that may be founded in exile; and
- Continue and increase efforts to support the refugee response to Burundi's protracted crisis.

To the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

- Consider the unique protection and psychological needs of human rights defenders and develop strategies to support them to continue their human rights work in exile;
- Continue to support and encourage host governments to issue Convention Travel Documents and provide basic services to refugees, including those in urban areas; and
- Continue to engage human rights defenders in the implementation of durable solutions for refugees, and expedite resettlement for human rights defenders facing serious security risks.

To the Government of Uganda

- Uphold the principles of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Refugee Act (2006) by ensuring the protection of refugees on its national territory;
- Amend the Refugees Act (2006) to repeal Section 35(d) which prohibits refugees from undertaking political work, which imposes limits on refugees rights protected under the Ugandan Constitution, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights;
- Continue to work with relevant partners to ensure that refugees have access to basic services, including those in urban areas; and
- Adhere to the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention against Corruption, including ensuring a transparent and conclusive investigation into allegations of corruption in the management of refugee operations.

To the Government of Rwanda

- Ensure freedom of movement for refugees by expediting the issuance of Convention Travel Documents, prioritising human rights defenders who need to travel for work or medical reasons;
- Explore strategies to increase the self-reliance of refugees; and
- Continue to work with relevant partners so that refugees can access basic services, including in urban areas.



To the Government of Burundi

- Immediately end all forms of repression of human rights actors, work towards a safe and conducive environment for human rights defenders;
- Immediately and unconditionally release human rights defenders who have been detained as a result of their work, including Germain Rukuki, Emmanuel Nshimirimana, Aimé Constant Gatore, Marius Nizigama, and Nestor Nibitanga;
- Conduct full, thorough, credible, transparent, and impartial investigations into all cases of assault, extrajudicial-killing, and enforced disappearance of critical voices, including human rights defenders such as Christophe Nkezabahizi, Marie-Claudette Kwizera, and Pierre Claver Mbonimpa and his relatives; and
- Engage with regional and international initiatives to bring an end to the crisis in Burundi and cooperate with regional and international human rights mechanisms, including the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Human Rights Council, and Commission of Inquiry on Burundi.

To the East African Community and its member states

- Create an enabling environment for human rights defenders to travel and work within the region, by ensuring that East African Community principles on the free movement of persons and labour are respected by each member state; and
- Renew commitment to an inclusive East Africa Community-led inter-Burundian dialogue and encourage members to actively engage in the process.

To the European Union and its member states

- Implement the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (2004) by providing practical support to human rights defenders in exile, including financial assistance for human rights defenders who seek to continue their work and establish organisations in exile;
- Ensure that country missions not only focus on human rights defenders from the host country but also consider the situation of human rights defenders living there in exile;
- Develop mechanisms that allow for the ad-hoc expedite assessment of resettlement requests by human rights defenders in exile;
- Facilitate the issuance of visas to Burundian human rights defenders who seek to engage in advocacy and awareness-raising missions in Europe; and
- As guarantors of the Arusha Agreement, continue to engage for a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Burundi.

To the African Union and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

- Call on the Government on Burundi to implement all relevant resolutions, including ACHPR/ Res. 396 (LXII) 2018; and
- Continue to monitor and condemn human rights violations in Burundi and encourage and engage in efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in Burundi in all relevant fora.

To the international community and all stakeholders

- Adopt the protection of human rights defenders and civil society as a foreign funding benchmark and a basic standard for foreign commitments on governmental funding; and
- Continue to call attention to Burundi's human rights situation, including the situation of human rights defenders in the country and those in exile, and to engage for a peaceful resolution of the Burundian crisis.



Annex: Support Mechanisms and Resources

Below is a list of organisations that HRDs can contact for protection, financial support, legal aid, or capacity building. Support mechanisms and projects for HRDs and urban refugees are subject to continuous change due to funding limitations and evolving priorities. This is not an exhaustive list. Please note that it is always best to look for updated information when the need arises, and to contact these organisations directly to discuss specific needs.

Support Mechanisms for HRDs

Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme (AEDH)

AEDH aims to protect HRDs and to respond rapidly to their calls for help when they are threatened or persecuted. AEDH intervenes depending on local context, the level of danger HRDs find themselves in, and the nature of their requests.

Location: France
Website: <http://www.aedh.org>
Phone: +33 437371011

Civil Rights Defenders

The Civil Rights Defenders emergency fund helps support HRDs who need to relocate temporarily, to protect important communication or documents, and to create security solutions.

Location: Sweden
Website: <https://crd.org/>
Email: info@civilrightsdefenders.org
Phone: +46 854527730

Digital Defenders Partnership

Digital Defenders Partnership is managed by Hivos and provides emergency grants to online users facing an urgent digital emergency in Internet-repressive environments. These grants provide legal advice and financial support to individuals with emergencies relating to cyber attacks, compromised accounts and devices, and secure connections.

Location: The Netherlands
Website: www.digitaldefenders.org
Email: ddp@hivos.org
Phone: +31 703765500



DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of African Human Rights Defenders Project)

DefendDefenders operates a 24/7 emergency hotline for HRDs in need of immediate assistance. It operates an emergency protection programme and provides advice on both digital and physical security. In Kampala, DefendDefenders also hosts a resource centre for HRDs, which offers a range of human rights literature as well as computers and Internet services.

Location: Uganda
Website: www.defenddefenders.org
Email: protection@defenddefenders.org
Phone: +256 783027611 (emergency hotline)

Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH)

FIDH, under the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, provides emergency material support to HRDs at risk working in the most difficult circumstances. Costs eligible for financial support or direct material support include the following: physical security, digital security, communications, secure transportation, legal support, medical support (including psychosocial support and rehabilitation), humanitarian assistance (including family support), urgent relocation, monitoring, reporting, or advocacy.

Location: France
Website: www.fidh.org
Email: obs@fidh.org
Phone: +33 143552078 or +33 143555505

Freedom House

The Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund provides emergency financial assistance to CSOs under threat or attack, and provides them with advocacy support. Lifeline provides small, short-term emergency grants for medical expenses, legal representation, prison visits, trial monitoring, temporary relocation, security, equipment replacement, and other types of urgent expenses. Emergency assistance is finite and given to address a time-sensitive threat.

Location: United States
Website: <https://freedomhouse.org/>
Email: info@freedomhouse.org
Phone: 1 (202) 296-5101

Front Line Defenders

Front Line Defenders protection grants provide timely and efficient financial assistance to pay for organisational and personal provisions to improve the security and protection of HRDs and their organisations, including physical and digital security, legal support, medical support, and family assistance.

Location: Ireland
Website: www.frontlinedefenders.org
Email: info@frontlinedefenders.org
Phone: +353 12100489 (emergency hotline)



Prisoners of Conscience (PoC)

PoC provides small grants to individuals who have been persecuted for their conscientiously-held beliefs, provided that they have not used or advocated violence, including political prisoners, HRDs, lawyers, environmental activists, teachers, and academics. PoC considers grant applications submitted by approved referral agencies.

Location: United Kingdom
Website: www.prisonersofconscience.org
Email: info@prisonersofconscience.org
Phone: +44 2074076644

ProtectDefenders.eu

ProtectDefenders.eu is the European Union HRD protection mechanism, led by a consortium of 12 NGOs active worldwide, established to protect HRDs at risk. They offer 24/7 emergency support for HRDs in immediate danger, as well as temporary relocation grants.

Location: Belgium
Website: www.protectdefenders.eu
Email: contact@protectdefenders.eu
Phone: +353 12100489

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

The mandate on the situation of human rights defenders was established to support the implementation of the 1998 Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Through the mechanisms for the submission of complaints, the Special Rapporteur receives information from HRDs and NGOs, including allegations of human rights violations committed against HRDs, and uses this information to submit urgent appeals or allegation letters to states.

Location: Switzerland
Website: www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders
Email: urgent-action@ohchr.org
Phone: +41 22917 1234

Urgent Action Fund Africa for Women's Human Rights (UAF-Africa)

Urgent Action Fund-Africa provides urgent financial and technical support for the protection of women's rights activists who are persecuted as a direct result of their activism. UAF-Africa makes small grants intended to enable a short-term intervention in the course of a long-term strategy and responds to most urgent requests within 24 hours.

Location: Kenya
Website: www.uaf-africa.org
Email: info@uaf-africa.org
Phone: +254 732577560 or +254 202301740



World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

OMCT is a coalition of NGOs fighting torture, summary executions, enforced disappearances and all other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. It has programmes that allow it to provide support to specific categories of people, including HRDs, as well as trainings. OMCT also runs the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, and the “Defend the Defenders” project to raise awareness about the situation of HRDs.

Location: Switzerland
Website: www.omct.org
Email: omct@omct.org
Phone: + 41 228094939

Support Mechanisms for Journalists

Article 19 – East Africa

Article 19 is an international organisation that advocates for freedom of expression. They have a programme in East Africa that supports the diversity of the media, as well as the safety and security of journalists in crisis. They run the East African Journalists Defence Network and provide emergency support for journalists at risk.

Location: Kenya
Website: www.article19.org
Email: kenya@article19.org
Phone: +254 727862230

Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE)

CJFE is a Canadian-based organisation that works to protect the right to free expression. Among other programmes, they provide humanitarian assistance to journalists around the world whose lives and well-being are threatened because of their work through their Journalists in Distress Fund. CJFE also coordinates a group of international organisations that share a similar mandate, in order to share information and accelerate response times.

Location: Canada
Website: www.cjfe.org
Email: jid@cjfe.org
Phone: 1 (416) 787 8156

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

CPJ defends the right of journalists to report the news without fear of reprisal. CPJ’s Journalist Assistance Programme provides direct assistance to journalists at risk and their families around the world, through a combination of financial and non-financial assistance. Emergency grants are dispensed through CPJ’s Gene Roberts Emergency Fund and when necessary, CPJ lobbies governments or international agencies to help secure refugee or asylum for journalists. CPJ also provides logistical support to journalists when they resettle in exile, and refers journalists to resources, including information on grants, fellowships, and awards.

Location: United States
Website: www.cpj.org
Email: report-violations@cpj.org
Phone: 1 (212) 465 1004



Doha Centre for Media Freedom (DC4MF)

DC4MF works for press freedom worldwide, with a specific interest in East Africa and journalists in exile. Their emergency assistance programme supports journalists and their families in need.

Location: Qatar
Website: www.dc4mf.org
Email: assistance@dc4mf.org
Phone: +974 40121600/1/2

Free Press Unlimited

Free Press Unlimited supports the right to reliable information, especially in crisis or conflict zones. As part of these efforts, they run 'Reporters Respond', an international emergency fund for journalists and media outlets in crisis.

Location: The Netherlands
Website: www.freepressunlimited.org
Email: reportersrespond@freepressunlimited.org
Phone: +31 208000444 or +31 638820516

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – Hotline for media professionals

The primary purpose of the hotline is to enable the ICRC to take prompt and effective action when journalists or their crew are arrested, captured, detained, reported missing, wounded, or killed. The ICRC may be able to seek confirmation of a reported arrest, provide information on the whereabouts of a missing journalist, obtain access to detained journalists, and recover or transfer mortal remains.

Location: Switzerland
Website: www.icrc.org
Email: press@icrc.org
Phone: +41 792173285

International Media Support (IMS)

IMS is an international media development organisation which works to enable local media to reduce conflict, strengthen democracy, and facilitate dialogue. They can also provide assistance grants.

Location: Denmark
Website: www.mediasupport.org
Email: info@mediasupport.org
Phone: +45 883270000



International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

The IFJ promotes international action to defend press freedom and social justice through strong, free, and independent trade unions of journalists. The Safety Fund is an integral part of the IFJ Safety Programme, which includes casework, protests, campaigns, provision of information, and production of various publications. While the Safety Fund provides immediate financial relief to a particular journalist, the Safety Programme strives to consistently highlight and improve the plight of journalists.

Location: Belgium
Website: www.ifj.org
Email: ifj@ifj.org
Phone: +32 22352208

International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF)

IWMF is dedicated to strengthening the role of women journalists worldwide. They run an emergency fund that allows women journalists to request assistance, and they coordinate the African Great Lakes Reporting Initiative.

Location: United States
Website: www.iwmf.org
Email: info@iwmf.org
Phone: 1 (202) 496 1992

Media Legal Defence Initiative (MLDI)

MLDI provides legal support to journalists and media outlets whose right to freedom of expression has been infringed upon, by supporting local lawyers and NGOs.

Location: United Kingdom
Website: www.mediadefence.org
Email: info@mediadefence.org
Phone: +44 2037525550

Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF)

RSF publish research and advocate for freedom of expression around the world. Their Assistance Desk provides financial and administrative assistance to professional journalists and citizen-journalists who have been the victims of reprisals because of their reporting. They have been active in working with exiled journalists in the sub-region, and their website also has guidelines for journalists in exile or seeking asylum.

Location: France
Website: www.rsf.org
For NGO and media outlet requests:
Email: assistance@rsf.org
Phone: +33 144836056
For individual requests:
Email: assistance2@rsf.org
Phone: +33 144838466



Rory Peck Trust (RPT)

Supporting exiled journalists in East Africa is a core aspect of RPT's assistance work. Aiming for sustainable solutions to long-term problems, RPT has provided support ranging from basic subsistence to seed funding for businesses and fledgling media outlets.

Location: United Kingdom
Website: www.rorypecktrust.org
Email: assistance@rorypecktrust.org
Phone: +44 2032197867

Organisations Providing Assistance to Urban Refugees in Uganda

Atrocities Watch Africa (AWA)

AWA focuses on preventing mass atrocities and fighting impunity. Among other activities, AWA provides capacity building opportunities on leadership for refugee representatives and youth.

Website: www.atrocitieswatch.org
Email: info@atrocitieswatch.org
Phone: +256 751259952

InterAid

InterAid offers an array of services for refugees, including medical assistance, one time food assistance support, and legal assistance such as following up on arrested and detained refugees and providing court fees and transport for civil cases. InterAid can also screen and refer cases to UNHCR.

Website: www.interaiduganda.org
Email: info@interaiduganda.org
Phone: +256 392002333

Finnish Refugee Council (FRC)

FRC offers skills training for refugees in income-generating activities, adult education in functional literacy and English language, and courses on business skills. It also provides training and mentoring for refugee groups and associations, and it runs a resource centre for refugees with a library and computers in Makindye, Kampala.

Website: www.pakolaisapu.fi/en
Phone: +256 787420583

Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS)

JRS offers assistance for refugees and asylum seekers, including temporary food assistance and rent support for newly arrived asylum seekers in emergency situations and urgent medical support for refugees. In Kampala, JRS also offers free English language classes, and skills training for income-generating activities including driving, catering, hairdressing, IT, and soap and candle making.

Website: www.jrsea.org
Email: uep.kampala@jrs.net
Phone: +256 414266264



Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)

OPM is responsible for managing refugee registration and the process of refugee status determination.

Website: www.opm.go.ug/refugees-management

Phone: +256 141231231

Refugee Law Project (RLP)

RLP can help refugees register support groups or human rights organisations and assist them in applying for funding. RLP also offers free legal aid for refugees in the form of representation in criminal court trials, documentation of refugee testimonies, assistance in appeal processes, mediation services in civil cases, and bail for arrested refugees. They also offer free English classes for adults, trainings on media and communication tools, psychological support and counselling for groups and individuals, and medical support for survivors of gender-based violence.

Website: www.refugeelawproject.org

Email: info@refugeelawproject.org

Phone: +256 414343556 or +256 414235330

Uganda Law Society (ULS)

Under its pro-bono project, ULS provides legal representation in court, legal advice and counselling, as well as support in mediation, negotiation, and arbitration.

Website: www.uls.or.ug

Email: uls@uls.or.ug

Phone: +256 414342424 and +256 414342431

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - Kampala

UNHCR schedules appointments to meet refugees and asylum seekers in Kampala at the offices of InterAid and the branch office extension. Each nationality is given a specific day on which appointments can be made in person at InterAid and the branch office.

Website: www.unhcr.org/uganda

Email: ugaka@unhcr.org

Phone: +256 141231231

Xavier Project

The Xavier Project provides education sponsorship in early childhood development, primary school and secondary school assistance. Through Tamuka Hub, it runs a computer centre with Internet access and classes on basic computer skills, business skills, career development, web design, graphic design, video editing, and citizen journalism.

Website: www.xavierproject.org

Email: info@xavierproject.org or education@xavierproject.org



Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID)

YARID is a refugee-run organisation that offers a variety of free courses, including classes in English language, business, literacy, and computer skills. They also run women's empowerment projects in tailoring and handicraft making, and offer a free meeting place and Internet access point at their headquarters in Nsambya, Kampala.

Website: www.yarid.org
Email: yariduganda@gmail.com
Phone: +256 756511335

Organisations Providing Assistance to Urban Refugees in Rwanda

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)

ADRA provides scholastic materials and financial assistance for tuition fees and uniforms.

Website: www.adra.org/country/rwanda
Email: info@adra.org.rw
Phone: +250 252574774 or +250 252574770

Inkomoko

Inkomoko, an affiliate of African Entrepreneur Collective, is a business incubator for small and medium businesses. In collaboration with the Government of Rwanda and UNHCR, Inkomoko offers business skills trainings for camp-based and urban refugee entrepreneurs to gain the technical tools and resources needed to grow their businesses, improve their personal financial sustainability, and create jobs for other refugees and members of the host community.

Website: www.inkomoko.com
Email: info@inkomoko.com
Phone: +250 786779012 or +250 788548441

Maison Shalom

Based in Kigali, Maison Shalom provides assistance to Burundian refugees through education, socio-economic support in the form of micro-credit, and psychosocial support.

Website: www.maisonshalom.org
Email: richardn@maisonshalom.org
Phone: +250 782341855

Ministry for Disaster Management and Refugees Affairs (MIDIMAR)

MIDIMAR is the Ministry responsible, among other issues, for the reception of asylum seekers and the determination of refugee status in Rwanda.

Website: www.midimar.gov.rw
Email: info@midimar.gov.rw
Phone: 170 (toll free number)

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - Kigali

UNHCR has fixed reception days at the Africa Humanitarian Action Health Centre in Kimihurura, Kigali.

Website: www.unhcr.org/rw
Email: rwaki@unhcr.org



Physical and Digital Security Resources

Security Manuals

“Stand Up! Security Manual for African Human Rights Defenders” is DefendDefenders’ organisational and personal security manual to help HRDs do their work in a safe and effective manner. Book One covers personal, physical, and organisational security planning. Book Two addresses digital security for electronic devices, and online accounts and communications.

Download it here: www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/StandUpfeb.pdf

The key points of the “Stand Up!” manual can also be found in the “Security in your pocket” brief

- Download in English: www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/SecurityInYourPocket_English.pdf
- Download in French: www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/SecurityInYourPocket_French.pdf
- Download in Arabic: https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/SecurityInYourPocket_Arabic.pdf

Other useful manuals are Protection International’s “New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders,” available in English and French (<https://www.protectioninternational.org/en/node/1106>) and Front Line Defenders’ “Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders” *at Risk* (<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/workbook-security-practical-steps-human-rights-defenders-risk>).

Digital Safety Learning Resources

Digital First Aid Kit (<https://www.digitaldefenders.org/digitalfirstaid/>) aims to provide preliminary support for people facing the most common types of digital threats. The Kit offers a set of self-diagnostic tools for HRDs, bloggers, activists and journalists facing attacks themselves, as well as providing guidelines for digital first responders to assist a person under threat.

“Surveillance Self-Defense” (<https://ssd.eff.org/>) is Electronic Frontier Foundation’s guide to defending yourself from surveillance by using secure technology and developing careful practices. Umbrella (<https://secfirst.org/umbrella>) is an app available for Android phones which functions as a security handbook in your pocket. It can be used to review information relevant to your own situation and use their built-in checklists to stay safe when facing risks.



Access Now Digital Security Helpline

The Digital Security Helpline is a free resource for civil society around the world. It offers real-time, direct technical assistance and advice to activists, independent media, and civil society organisations, including:

- Rapid response on digital security incidents;
- Personalised recommendations, instructions, and follow-up support on digital security issues;
- Help assessing risks and creating organisational or community security strategies;
- Guidance on security practices and tools for organisations, communities, groups, and individuals;
- Support for securing technical infrastructure, websites, and social media against attack;
- Referrals, capacity-building, in-person consultations, and training; and
- Education materials in multiple languages.

The Digital Security Helpline is operated by a global team who are available 24/7, responsive to incidents in a rapid, efficient, and uniform manner, and multilingual (fluent in English, Arabic, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Filipino). Contact them at: help@accessnow.org

DefendDefenders Digital Safety Helpline

If you encounter suspicious emails, file attachments, links, instant messenger behaviour, or computer behavior which you suspect may be related to a digital safety threat against you, contact helpline@defenddefenders.org or send a message to +256 787556560 (Signal, WhatsApp) for digital safety advice, analysis, and referral. Support is available in English, French, Luganda, Kinyarwanda, and Kirundi.



DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) seeks to strengthen the work of human rights defenders throughout the sub-region by reducing their vulnerability to risks of persecution, and by enhancing their capacity to effectively defend human rights.

DefendDefenders is the secretariat of EHAHRD-Net, a network of hundreds of members in the eleven countries of the East and Horn of Africa sub-region: Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia (together with Somaliland), South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

 www.defenddefenders.org

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 info@defenddefenders.org

 @DefendDefenders

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The Burundian Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (CBDDH) is a coalition of organisations defending and promoting human rights in Burundi, with the aim to improve the working environment and the protection of human rights defenders. CBDDH is a platform established to promote synergy, cooperation, collaboration, and sharing of best practices among human rights defenders at the national and international levels to overcome the challenges encountered.

 www.burundihrdcoalition.org

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