



DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

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Burundi: after new UN resolution, the government should resume cooperation

Geneva-Kampala, 6 October 2020 — In the absence of concrete progress on Burundi's human rights situation, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) has extended the mandate of its Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on the country, a step DefendDefenders welcomes as the most sensible way forward for the protection of human rights. The Burundian government should realise that non-cooperation is a dead end, and resume its cooperation with the CoI and the entire UN human rights system.

"The new Burundian President, Évariste Ndayishimiye, and the government, are now facing a very clear choice," said Hassan Shire, Executive Director, DefendDefenders. **"They could continue on the same track of non-cooperation or demonstrate political will to improve the country's human rights situation and re-engage with the international community."**

In addition to extending the CoI's mandate, the resolution adopted by the HRC today highlights ongoing grave human rights violations and abuses committed by Burundi's police, security forces, intelligence service, and members of the ruling CNDD-FDD party, including its youth league, the *Imbonerakure*. These violations include, among others, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions, acts of torture, sexual and gender-based violence, and attacks against human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists, and members of civil society. According to the CoI, some of the violations it has documented may amount to crimes against humanity. The resolution also denounces the widespread impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators and deplores the shrinking space for civil society in Burundi.

Reflecting on political developments in the country, including the general elections held on 20 May 2020, the resolution also mentions hope for progress, including statements made by President Ndayishimiye regarding reforms and reconciliation, while expressing grave concern over serious irregularities during the electoral process and ongoing socio-economic and humanitarian challenges. These early signs are yet to translate into concrete human rights progress. Authorities could take immediate steps, such as releasing detained HRDs and journalists.

"We urge Burundi to open a new chapter for both its people and its relationship with the international community," said Estella Kabachwezi, Advocacy, Research and Communications Manager, DefendDefenders. **"Continued human rights scrutiny and enhanced political dialogue between Burundi and African and UN actors are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually reinforcing."**

The resolution, which ensures continued scrutiny of Burundi at the HRC, as well as continued investigations by the CoI, has been adopted as regional and international actors are assessing ways of re-engaging Burundi. From 14 to 19 September 2020, a strategic assessment mission dispatched by the UN Secretary-General visited the country.

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The resolution adopted today is the eighth HRC resolution regarding Burundi's human rights situation since 2015. The HRC established the CoI – the only independent mechanism mandated to publicly report on Burundi's situation – in 2016 to investigate violations and abuses, identify perpetrators, formulate recommendations to ensure accountability, and engage with the Burundian authorities and other stakeholders. On 23 September 2020, the CoI presented its fourth report to the HRC.¹

Ahead of the Council's 45th regular session (14 September-7 October 2020), DefendDefenders coordinated the development of a joint civil society [letter](#)² endorsed by Burundian, African, and international civil society organisations. The letter called on states to support the renewal of the CoI's mandate. It outlined ongoing violations and impunity, opportunities offered by a potential political transition, and a way forward for the Burundian authorities: making measurable progress on key human rights indicators.

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¹ See Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Commission of Inquiry on Burundi," <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIBurundi/Pages/CoIBurundi.aspx> (accessed on 6 October 2020).

² DefendDefenders *et al.*, "Burundi: Vital role of the Commission of Inquiry in prompting meaningful human rights progress," 20 August 2020, <https://defenddefenders.org/burundi-vital-role-of-the-commission-of-inquiry-in-prompting-meaningful-human-rights-progress/> (accessed on 6 October 2020).