



Burundi Watch Update

9 – 15 January 2018



Burundi is breaking the law

The spokesperson of the National Independent Electoral Commission (known by its French acronym, CENI) Prosper Ntahorwamiye declared that the government of Burundi is taking advantage of the campaign meant to explain the new draft of the constitution to instead encourage them to vote for it. According to Ntahorwamiye, the CENI cannot encourage either a yes or no vote as this campaign is meant to start fourteen days before the poll day of the referendum. A referendum in May 2018 will allow the people to decide whether or not the new draft of the constitution should be adopted. The new draft extends presidential terms from five to seven years.

Refugees refused aid

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) suspended aid to over 2000 refugees in a transit camp in South Kivu in DRC from January 1, 2018 because the refugees refused to be registered using the biometrics system, arguing that it violates their religion. The refugees in question belong to a religious sect led by a prophet called Zebiya and say that they left Burundi because of religious persecution. The UNHCR says that it requires refugees to be registered using the biometrics system. The refugees have resorted to selling personal effects such as utensils and clothes to survive since they are no longer receiving aid and they asked the UNHCR to find another method of registration.

CSOs oppose new constitution

Twenty-three civil society organizations in Burundi whose registration was revoked over their alleged support for the failed 2015 coup in Burundi launched a campaign to encourage citizens to resist the government's plan to amend the constitution with the referendum in May 2018. The civil society organizations say

that the amendments violate [Article 299 of the 2005 constitution](#) which states that revisions may be retained if they infringe national unity. A spokesperson for the Ministry of the Interior said that the campaign is null and void.

Opposition leader under threat

The leader of the opposition in Burundi, Agathon Rwaso, says he is being threatened by the government for his opposition to the government's proposed amendment of the constitution. The opposition leader said that he has received several death threats and pressure to go into exile and he adds that the government sees him as a danger. On Monday last week, he said that his military security detail was removed and replaced by police.

Arrests

Two supporters of the opposition were arrested in Nyabihanga in Mwaro province. Innocent Niyungeko and Stany Ntakarutimana were arrested on January 7, 2018 under the orders of the Nyabihanga commune administrator, who accused them of holding an illegal meeting.

About twenty other opposition supporters were arrested on accusations of campaigning against the constitutional amendment while the government conducts an unlawful campaign to encourage people to vote yes in the referendum.

Atrocities Watch Africa

Atrocities Watch Africa (AWA) is a non-partisan, civil society organization and institution that intends to provide continental leadership in matters pertaining to the prevention of mass atrocities within Africa and beyond, through multi-pronged approaches that infuse ownership, legitimacy, and sustainable interface. AWA's strategic and approaches are grounded in the realization that atrocities can be prevented through various interventions, including, but not limited to, early warning mechanisms, diplomatic efforts, use of social media and new technologies, litigation, and advocacy campaigns.

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