



Burundi Watch Update

16 – 22 January 2018



60 arrested for opposing referendum

Civil society organizations and the opposition in Burundi accuse the government of arresting people who are encouraging the population to reject the proposed constitutional amendments.

The Burundi government proposed changes to the constitution could extend the president's time in office beyond 2020 when his current term ends if they are voted for in the May 2018 referendum.

Vital Nshirimana, the head of the Forum for Strengthening the Civil Society in Burundi, said that about 60 people have been arrested for advocating that the people vote "no." These arrests are an indicator that the referendum will not be fair. Hamissi Sultan of the opposition party *Forces Nationales de Libération* (FNL) was arrested earlier this month on the same charges of opposing the proposed changes. He was released days later without charge.

Burundi still violating human rights says UN

An examination of Burundi by the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) done by the United Nations Human Right Council to all member states has shown that Burundi is still violating human rights in the form of torture, sexual violence, extra judicial killings and oppression of the freedom of expression.

This is the third time Burundi has been reviewed under the procedure. The head of the US delegation Jason Mack expressed his dismay at the lack of corporation displayed by Burundi. Mack said that government officials regularly threaten UN personnel. This is on top of the fact that Burundi has suspended collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) and has refused to grant the UN commission of inquiry access to investigate human rights.

Burundi asked to improve

After the results of the Universal Periodic Review were announced concerning Burundi, various member states of the United Nations came out to ask Burundi to redouble its efforts to ensure that human rights are respected. The delegations commended Burundi for the formation of bodies such as the National Commission of Unity and Reconciliation as well as the National Observatory for the Prevention and Eradication of Genocide. A number of delegations made concrete recommendations to the government in order to improve the situation of human rights in Burundi. For instance, the Spanish delegation proposed strengthening the work of the National Independent Human Rights Commission while the delegation from Slovakia suggested that Burundi's government give more training to the security forces and hold them accountable for abuse of human rights.

Main opposition party to boycott referendum

The opposition coalition CNARED has called for a boycott of the referendum scheduled for May this year. They came to this decision after it became known that the government was already campaigning for people to vote "yes" despite the fact that this is in violation of the rules of the electoral commission.

23 CSO calls for resistance

23 civil society organizations in Burundi launched a campaign called "Teshwa ute," which calls for the resistance against the proposed revision of the constitution. The initiator of the campaign, Vital Nshimirimana, appealed to the international community to help stop the referendum. He also said that this revision would risk civil war and a possible coup. Vital further called on citizens to participate in non-violent actions designed to obstruct 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.

