



Burundi Watch Update

13 – 20 February 2018



Force used in Burundi referendum register

Burundian opposition parties are complaining that people are being forced to register to vote in the referendum set for May this year. The referendum will consider a raft of constitutional amendments that, among other things, extend the president's term from five to seven years. Leonce Ngendakumana, the deputy chairperson of the FRODEBU party, stated that people are being intimidated to register for voting in the referendum. He said that roadblocks had been set up, likely by government supported youth to check for receipts of registration. Those who did not have the receipts and are of age were forced to go and register.

He also says that even 16-year olds are being made to register since they will be eligible to vote in the 2020 elections. There have also been reports of students in this age group being asked for registration in schools. Like voting, the registration process is meant to be voluntary. Ngendakuma said that forced registration contributed to the environment of "extreme intimidation" within which the referendum was being carried out. "A referendum held in such conditions will result to a biased outcome."¹ The *Conseil National pour le Respect de l'Accord d'Arusha pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Burundi et al Restauration de l'Etat de Droit* (CNARED), an opposition coalition, spokesperson, Pancrace Cimpaye, said that the enforced registration is the government' plan "to counter (the population's) low enthusiasm for the referendum."² The government says that it is carrying out a registration drive but that people are not being forced to register.

¹ "Burundians forced to sign up to vote in referendum, opposition says." Read more on <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2018-02-17-burundians-forced-to-sign-up-to-vote-in-referendum-opposition-says/>

² "Burundi opposition slams enforced referendum enrollment." Read more on <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/burundi-opposition-slams-enforced-referendum-enrollment-20180216>

Police warn against anti referendum campaigns

The police in Burundi warned the opposition against campaigning against the May referendum, warning anyone campaigning against the referendum or trying to stop the process. The government says all campaigning, for and against, should take place in a two week period prior to the referendum, even as they are already promoting the referendum. Opposition parties have complained that this constitutes a double standard. Four students and a teacher were arrested last week in Northern Ngozi because they were going door to door telling people to vote against the referendum. They are reportedly among a wider group of at least 50 activists who have been arrested.³

³ "Burundi police threaten opposition to constitution change" Read more on <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/burundi-police-threaten-opposition-to-constitution-change-20180214>