



Burundi Watch Update March 2017



SUMMARY

The situation in Burundi remains tense, with a number of arbitrary arrests, abductions and killings occurring. Many of the cases are constitutional referendum related crimes. Meanwhile, neighbouring countries are beginning to push for repatriation of refugees.

One killed for refusing constitutional referendum

In the remote District of Cendajuru in the North Eastern province repression related to the constitutional referendum continues to affect mainly the voiceless. Simon Bizimana was an ordinary citizen from Gisoro hill in the District of Cendajuru. He was arrested on 14 February 2018 by local chiefs Isaac Nkurikiye and Marc Nimpa accusing him of refusing to register for the forthcoming constitutional referendum. Video footage show Mr. Bizimana politely responding to a police officer, kneeling and holding his bible, went viral on social media.

Because of his religious beliefs, Bizimana contended that a “man of God cannot go to elections.” Because of his opposition to registering for the constitutional referendum, he was taken to the Police District chief,

Donatien Rirabakina, who, in close collaboration with the Chief of District of Cendajuru, Madame



*Simon Bizimana as he undergoes interrogation by a police officer.
Credit: On the ground monitor*

Béatrice Nibaruta, planned for his torture. One month later, he died. While

attempting to justify the death, the national police released a medical certificate arguing that Bizimana died of malaria. However another medical report indicated that Bizimana tested negative for malaria.

Mkapa wants Burundi dialogue to concluded

At the recent Summit of the Heads of States of the East African Community in Entebbe in the Republic of Uganda on 23 February 2018, the Facilitator in the Inter Burundian Dialogue, former president Benjamin William Mkapa presented his report to the Summit. He submitted that the EAC should continue leading the negotiation process in the Republic of Burundi and called upon all parties to expeditiously conclude the dialogue under the facilitator and the mediator.¹ In



*President Mkapa receives President Kafando as they talk Burundi in Dar es salaam.
Credit: Machoca Tembele on twitter*

preparation for the forthcoming session of the Inter Burundian Dialogue, President Michel Kafando, the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General met President Mkapa, in his office in Dar es Salaam on 22 March 2018. The objective

¹ See Joint Communiqué: 19th Ordinary Summit of the Heads of States of the East African Community, available at <https://www.eac.int/communique/1001-joint-communiqu%C3%A9-19th-ordinary-summit-of-heads-of-state-of-the-east-african-community>

of Kafando's visit was to exchange on how to move the process forward after the EAC Summit of Entebbe.

Women prefer hate speech

On 31 March 2018, members of the National Women's Forum gathered to celebrated International Women's Day on 8 March. Participants to the gathering performed songs calling colonizers, Europeans and opponents to Pierre Nkurunziza venomous snakes that deserve to be beheaded before the end of 2018. They also reiterated that they will vote en masse for the constitutional referendum. The women took advantage of the demonstration to threaten the "enemies of the CNDD" and say that they deserve nothing but hanging.

The event was graced by the presence of the Vice President Gaston Sindimwo and the Mayor of Bujumbura, Freddy Mbonimpa.

Burundi opposition boycotts referendum

During the meeting of the coalition of the opposition CNARED held in Brussels from 24 to 26 April 2018, 19 members of the opposition platform CNARED released a statement rejecting the forthcoming constitutional referendum.

In their view, the constitutional referendum will deeply undermine the Arusha Peace Agreement and shows that President Pierre Nkurunziza has crossed the red line as he called for the constitutional referendum.

According to CNARED, the constitutional referendum will put an end to all efforts to achieve a peaceful and negotiated solution. Opposition leaders demanded that Burundians boycott the referendum and CNARED will not be bound by the results of the referendum.

Members of CNARED demanded EAC leaders and the sponsors of the Arusha Peace Agreement to dissuade President Pierre Nkurunziza from holding the referendum. They also threatened that they would not participate in any election that is not organized in accordance with a specific agreement between all stakeholders following an inclusive dialogue.

They said that they are ready to attend the next peace talks, provided that the constitutional referendum is abandoned and President Nkurunziza commits to respect the Arusha Peace Agreement.

Zebiya Cult followers return to Burundi

The followers of Zebiya cult came to international attention after four of its members were killed in Kamanyola after clashes with Congolese police in September 2017. Ever since the believers of Zebiya have systematically refused to cooperate with the government of the DRC and the UNHCR mainly on submitting biometric registration and taking vaccination. In early March 2018, as the relationship between the group and the DRC authorities remained tense, they decided to cross to neighboring Rwanda. They again refused to undergo biometric registration and take vaccination and rather preferred to return to Burundi. The move that commenced on 1 April 2018 as 1,604 individuals crossed to Burundi via Gasenyi Nemba in the northern province of Kirundo. A second cohort of 514 crossed via Kanyaru in the northern province of Kayanza whereas the last cohort made up of 381 individuals came via the Ruhwa border in the western province of Cibitoke.



Zebiya followers returning in Burundi.

Source: AWA monitor

Tanzania wants Burundian refugees out

Tanzania hosts about 274,455 Burundian refugees and has repeatedly called for their repatriation.

During the two past months, a state of insecurity and fear was reported within Nyarugusu and Nduta refugee camps that host a number of Burundian refugees. Police found two AK47 guns in zone 9 of Nyarugusu Camp that are believed to belong to a group of thieves.

Because of such a threat, refugees are leaving conventional refugee camps and settling in Tanzanian villages including Mwamugongo, Bugamba, Ntongwe, Fipa, Mutanga to name but a few. Some have ended up in prison as they are not allowed to settle outside refugee camps.

The meeting of the Tripartite Commission on Voluntary Repatriation was held in Bujumbura from 26 to 28 March 2018 following the previous meeting held in Dar-es-Salaam from 29 to 31 August 2017.

During the meeting, it was claimed that from 7 September 2017 to date, 20,700 Burundian refugees have been repatriated voluntarily.² UNHCR Representative Soufiane Adjali commended the parties who spared no expense to achieve these results. He called on all parties to redouble their efforts to better coordinate activities and to help as many Burundian refugees as possible to return to their country of origin. The head of the Tanzanian delegation and director of the Refugee Service at the United Republic of Tanzania's Ministry of the Interior Harrison Wingia Mseke asserted that the security situation has improved a lot and now Burundi is a peaceful place to live.

Pierre Nkurunziza continues Rwanda fight

Since the beginning of the crisis, Burundi has systematically boycotted all international events and gatherings organized in neighboring Rwanda. Once again, as all AU member states sent high delegations of heads of state and government to Kigali to discuss the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) between 17-21 March 2018, the Burundi delegation was absent.

In a letter dated 14 March 2018, President Pierre Nkurunziza argued that Burundi could not attend a meeting held in Rwanda because the country hosts the 2015 coup plotters and terrorists that bereaved Burundi in 2015. Pierre Nkurunziza recalled that he petitioned the UN, the EAC and the ICGLR against Rwanda.

² See "Réunion de la Commission tripartite sur le rapatriement volontaire des réfugiés burundais en Tanzanie," *Publication de Presse Burundaise*, <https://ppbdi.com/index.php/extras/politique-cooperation-actualite-internationales/9531-mininter-reunion-de-la-commission-tripartite-sur-le-rapatriement-volontaire-des-refugies-burundais-en-tanzanie>

In the same vain, as the followers of Zebiya voluntarily returned to Burundi, the government of Burundi claimed that they were expelled because they refused to enlist in the Rwandan backed armed groups.³

Human rights violations

Some of the cases reported during the report period include arbitrary arrests, abduction, assassination and grenade attacks. Arbitrary arrests are characterized by a similar pattern where individuals are arrested and detained incommunicado or without charges.

- On 8 March 2018 Ir Aloys Nintunze was abducted in the District of Gisuru by unknown persons and taken to an unknown destination. He was working on the construction of an office of the Burundi Revenue Authority at the border between Burundi and Tanzania.
- On 15 March 2018 Ildephonse Harerimana was arrested at the elementary school ECOFO Ryarusera accused of advocating a no vote in the referendum in his teaching.
- On 21 March 2018, Michel Ndereyimana was shot dead by police accusing him of stealing electric cables. As the national police spokesman Pierre Nkurikiye argued in a tweet, a policeman hot in the air and the bullet landed in Michel's head.⁴ The deceased had recently been released following presidential pardon in early March.
- On 19 March 2018 the decomposing body of an unidentified person was found at Mugomere hill in the city of Rumonge.
- On 21 March 2018, journalist and BBC correspondent Judith Basutama was obliged to appear and was interrogated for four hours in the office of the prosecutor in relation to hre translation, which the government claims was erroneous, of the title given to President Pierre Nkurunziza who was raised to the title of “Imboneza yamaho” or “ the eternal supreme guide.”
- On 22 March 2018, arson destroyed all properties belonging to Albin Niyonizigiye in Muzenga Hill in the District of Rutovu.

³ See Presidency of the Republic of Burundi, “Communique du Gouvernement sur le Refoulement des Réfugiés Burundais par le Rwanda,” 4 April 2018, available at <http://www.presidence.gov.bi/2018/04/04/communique-du-gouvernement-sur-le-refoulement-des-refugies-burundais-par-le-rwanda/>

⁴ See <https://twitter.com/ikiriho/status/976720347679678465>

- On 22 March 2018, failed Burundian asylum seeker Clément Nkurunziza was deported from the USA and arrested and detained by the NIS in Bujumbura ever since.
- On 23 March 2018, a 13 year old female Belyse Ndayikengurukiye was killed. Her body was recovered at Muhweza in the District of Rutovu. She was raped before she was killed.
- On 24 March 2018, a grenade attack in Kinama resulted in two wounded.
- On 24 March 2018, the dead body of a man identified as Alexandre Ntahondereye was found at Gihanga Hill in the District of Rutovu. The body showed several stabs.
- On 26 March 2018 Caporal Chef Rubin Ndayikeza, working with the Ministry of Defense as a soldier and bus driver was abducted by unknown persons.
- On 27 March 2018, Donatien Minani aka Kanyamuduri was arrested at Mugina after he sang the widely known traditional song “inyundo irakura ntisumba iyayujuje” which eventually angered authorities.
- On 27 March 2018, Daniel Manirakiza, RANAC representative in Muramvya, was arrested by the police in the same district.
- On 28 March 2018, Corporal Janvier Bizimana working in Camp Kirundo was abducted by NIS agents and taken to an unknown destination.
- On 28 March 2018, Audace Butoyi was abducted from Bwiza by unknown people and taken to unknown destination.
- On 28 March 2018, Advocate Ladislas Ndayiragije was abducted by police from his office situated downtown Bujumbura. Later on, in the afternoon of the same day, the national police stated that Advocate Ladislas was arrested for threatening national security with two other people whose identities were not disclosed.
- On 30 March 2018, an UPRONA activist Juvénal Nibizi was arrested in the District of Rugombo.
- On 31 March 2018, a local FNL chief in Susa, in the District of Ntega, Adboul Rwaswa, was beaten and taken to the Kirundo police station on the accusation of campaigning for a no vote in the referendum.
- On 1 April 2018, a grenade attack in Rugari-Gitamo in the District of Gitega resulted in two dead and five wounded. So far all the victims seem to be Imbonerakure.

- On 1 April 2018, a 21 year old man, Audace Ndayisenga, was shot by police around 3 AM. Audace is a motorcyclist and apparently refused to obey the police who had asked him to stop his motorcycle.
On 1 April 2018, six hills including Ntango, Rutagara, Kinyovu, Kucarubambo, Mugendo in Mugendo in the District of Ntega found strange writing on their doors as unknown people wrote EGO (Yes) or OYA (No). Inhabitants believe that the writing was left by Imbonerakure patrolling at night.

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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