



Burundi Watch Update

September 2018



Summary

In Burundi the month of August was marked by a high number of arbitrary arrests. In preparation for the 2020 general election, the government of Burundi set up a new electoral commission that has raised controversy among political actors. The situation of Burundian refugees remains a matter of concern due to infiltration of Imbonerakure militiamen and national intelligence service agents into the refugee camps.

Burundi sets up new electoral commission

While the world keeps calling Burundian stakeholders to resume the Inter-Burundian dialogue with the aim of finding a proper solution to the ongoing crisis, the government of Burundi continues preparing itself towards 2020 general elections. After the controversial constitutional referendum in May 2018, the government of Burundi organized a meeting in Kayanza that came up with a roadmap to the 2020 elections.¹ On 27 August 2018, the government of Burundi took another step by appointing a new electoral commission (CENI). The parliamentary vote for the members of the commission was boycotted by members of parliament



¹ See Burundi update watch August 2018, available at <https://www.africanwatch.org/burundi/2018/08/august-2018/>

Pierre Claver Kazihise while demonstrating against the UN mission in Burundi in 2014. Credit. Isanganiro

from the coalition Amizero y'Abarundi arguing that their group had not been consulted on the matter. Pierre Claver Kazihise, Anonciate Niyonkuru, Serges Ndayiragije, Hyacynthe Niyonzima, Marguerite Kamana and Philippe Nzobonariba were appointed as the members of the CENI. Some criticized this action as inappropriate in a context in which the third term related crisis remains unresolved. Others raised questions about the CENI's membership. Pierre Claver Kazihise and Philippe Nzobonariba are particularly controversial. The former, appointed president of the commission, is known for fighting independent civil society and international human rights mechanisms. For example, he was seen demonstrating alone against the UN mission in Burundi (BINUB), who he accused of discriminating among civil society, in 2014.² The spokesperson of the new CENI, Mr Philippe Nzobonariba was, until his new appointment, the spokesperson of the government and has been accused of inciting hatred against the opposition and the international community, which he repeatedly accused of destabilizing Burundi and employing imperialist agenda.

Threats Burundian refugees in Tanzania continue

Harassment of Burundian refugees has continued to increase since our last reporting. In Nduta refugee camp, August 2018 was particularly marked by an active search for intellectuals and former members of security forces in Burundi.

According to a number of sources, a list of target was drafted by Sungusungu and a team assigned to arrest them set up. The Sungusungu who coordinate the operation are Burundian refugees who collaborate with the Tanzanian police to ensure safety in the camp, along with Burundian intelligence agents who have infiltrated the camp.

² See Burundi : Fin officielle des travaux de BNUB sur fond de manifestation en solo, available on <http://isanganiro.org/spip.php?article8321>

One of the strategies is to organize sports in the camp and then arresting participants, accusing them of attending a paramilitary training.

Since 10 August 2018, some measures taken in the camps have made life more complicated for refugees. For example, in three camps, Mutendeli, Nyarugusu, Nduta, no one can leave the camp and travel beyond the camp perimeter; refugees are not allowed to collect firewood and markets are still closed. Refugees who try to leave the camp in search of firewood or go to market have been injured or abducted by people believed to be Sungusungu and infiltrated Burundian agents. In Nyarugusu refugee camp, three families were arrested by the police on 8 August 2018 as they attempted to leave the camp.

During a meeting held on 10 August 2018, the deputy representative of the Nyarugusu camp was accompanied by the chief of police and the representative of Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). In his speech, the deputy representative of the Nyarugusu camp confirmed that all businesses and any activity generating income to refugees including guest houses, cinemas, and services selling airtime will be closed no later than 15 August 2018.

He also added that contrary to previous schedules, the common market will be open only once on Friday instead of three times as it was previously organized. Refugees will no longer be authorized to seek medical care outside the camp. Visitors from outside the camp will no longer access the camp.

On 15 August 2018, twenty-seven (27) motorcycles were seized by the police from refugees using them outside the camp. Some of the owners eventually arrested and detained in Nyamusivya Prison in the District of Kibondo.

On 16 August 2018, very early the morning, Nyarugusu camp was surrounded by heavily armed police. They carried out a search operation, seizing and destroying solar panels.

In Mutendeli camp, on 12 August 2018, some refugees were injured when they were attacked by imbonerakure as they left the camp to go to their fields or search firewood. Some were gravely wounded with machetes and later transferred to hospitals in Kibondo District.

On the early morning of 15 August 2018, heavily armed police came into the Muungano common market located outside the camp and blocked the paths leading to it. Refugees who managed to leave the camp were beaten as the police prevented them from arriving to Muungano common market and their property destroyed or stolen by the police.

On Friday, 24 August 2018, the government of Tanzania instructed international NGO employees to provide their visas and work permit no later than Monday, 27 August 2018. Requesting official documents during the weekend was seen as a way of making it very difficult for individuals to obtain them before the deadline.

Burundi turns to religion

It has become a tradition. Although it is rarely commented on, twice a year, the family of President Pierre Nkurunziza gathers high officials of the country in a week of prayers. This provides an important opportunity to recall that he is chosen to lead the country. During the summer prayers held in Buhiga in the central province of Karusi from 22 to 26 August 2018, Pierre Nkurunziza suggested that his parents gave him a good name for he is called after the good news whereas those referring to animals like birds would never be leaders of Burundi. Because many are now familiar with such a coded message spoken during similar gatherings, some speculate about his closest collaborators. For example, one of the top officials in his government and Minister of Security bears the name of Bunyoni which would mean small birds.

Nkurunziza also took advantage of the gathering to send a tough message to Rwanda, whom he accused of taking Burundian refugees hostage and making them slaves.

After Nkurunziza, who may end his presidency in 2020, spoke, senior official

Athanase Hatungimana aka Cokoroko, who said in Kayanza in July that the successor of Nkurunziza will be one behaving like him, took the floor. This may have prompted the current CNDD-FDD secretary general and potential candidate, General Evariste Ndayishimiye to organize a three day prayer session beginning 30 August 2018 at the headquarters of the ruling CNDD-FDD party in Ngagara. According to General Ndayishimiye, the party committed to give the Lord Jesus the first place and the prayers were organized in preparation of a national prayer to be held in Gitega in January 2019.³



Leaders of the CNDD-FDD during the prayer of 30 August 2018. Credit: RTNB on twitter

Drummers disappear in Switzerland

On 23 August 2018, the media was crowded with news of the flight of 16 Burundian drummers who were participating to the Fribourg event in Switzerland. According to several sources, the team of drummers started shrinking after their first performance and in three days, only four drummers remained while 12 had disappeared after their 19 August performances.

The government of Burundi responded by saying that it had no information about any such group departing at that time and saying that

³ See RNTB, “Le Parti CNDD-FDD organise une prière d’action de grâce de trois jours” 30 August 2018, available at <http://www.rtnb.bi/fr/art.php?idapi=2/6/69>

it was shocked that the Belgian embassy could have issued Schengen visas to such people, without official documents, in spite of the strict application process for visas. They thus concluded that the incident was a hoax organized by the Belgians and human traffickers to tarnish Burundi's image.⁴ In reaction these accusations, some EU countries including Switzerland, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the Delegation of the European Union in Burundi released a joint statement suggesting rejecting any attempt to undermine the image of Burundi and argued that 99.2% of properly documented official applications were successful.⁵

Judge sentenced after clash with Imbonerakure chief

On 13 August 2018, a senior judge of the Tribunal of Bururi, Claver Ndikumasabo was arrested following a verbal clash with the headmaster of the paramedical school of Bururi, Mr Zabulon Nyandwi, while drinking at the Phoenecia hotel in Bururi on 12 August 2018. After the quarrel, Judge Ndikumasabo was arrested and detained at Bururi prison and charged with insulting Zabulon Nyandwi. According to eyewitnesses, the two people were discussing the situation in Burundi and Nyandwi, who is the president of the Imbonerakure in Bururi, reported the conversation to the police who arrested Ndikumasabo.

On 23 August 2018, the Court of Appeals in Bururi province sentenced Ndikumasabo to one month imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 BIF (57 USD).

⁴See Communiqué du gouvernement, 24 August 2018, available at <http://ambaburundi.be/index.php/777-communique-du-gouvernement-24-08-2018-fr>

⁵ "Déclaration des Ambassades de Belgique, de France et des Pays-Bas, de la Délégation de l'UE et du Bureau de Coopération Suisse au Burundi suite au communiqué du Gouvernement burundais du 24 août 2018 concernant la délivrance des visas Schengen," 25 August 2018, available at https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/burundi/49735/d%C3%A9claration-des-ambassades-de-belgique-de-france-et-des-pays-bas-de-la-d%C3%A9l%C3%A9gation-de-l%E2%80%99ue-et_en

Taking into consideration the nature, the extent and the context of the dispute, Ndikumamasabo appears only to have been arrested and sentenced because he opposed an Imbonerakure chief.

Journalists assaulted during reporting

The ongoing crisis has deeply affected freedom of the press in Burundi. Since 2015, dozens of journalists have been persecuted in various ways. So far, about a hundred journalists have been obliged to flee the country. Continuing this pattern, on 27 August 2018 three journalists for Radio Culture, namely Majesté Barenga, Alain Niyomucamanza, Bella Gloria Akimana and their driver Armand Bigirumuremyi were assaulted in Kigeri, in the neighborhood of Ngagara while reporting on a land dispute between the population and the administration.

The police officers in Kigeri prevented the journalists from reporting and held them, wounding the journalist Majesté Barenga shooting him in the back.

Human rights violations

Some of the cases reported by our ground human rights monitors during the report period include:

On 3 August 2018, three FNL activists, namely Frédéric Bujana, Denis Ncurebugufi and Désiré Singirankabo. were assaulted by Imbonerakure militiamen in Bibara hill in the District of Mutambu.

On 5 August 2018, Dieudonné Nduwimana was killed and two unidentified persons were wounded after the shooting of a soldier assigned to Mudubugu military post in the District of Gihanga.

On 5 August 2018, an ambush perpetrated by unknown gunmen on a military pick up at the National road number five (RN5) in the District of Gihanga resulted in three soldiers being killed and five being gravely wounded

On 6 August 2018, the dead body of a 40-year-old woman, Janvière Ntakarutimana, was recovered in a banana plantation at Camumandu Hill, in the District of Rutegama. The victim showed signs of rape.

On 8 August 2018, two men were arrested by Imbonerakure militiamen at Ruhororo hill in the District of Mabayi. The militiamen accused them of attempting to cross the border into Rwanda to join armed groups.

On 9 August 2018, four persons from the same family, namely Mbazumutima, his wife Odile, their daughter Leila and their son Bertrand, were arrested after the police searched their home. Mbazumutima and his son were transferred to the national intelligence service in Bujumbura. Mrs. Odile and her daughter Leila were kept in Gihanga police station without being charged with anything. Mr. Mbazumutima is a retired soldier who served with the former Burundian Armed Forces and the police suspects him of belonging to armed groups and possessing military items.

On 11 August 2018, Leonidas Ndayizeye was killed by unidentified persons at his home at Rubindi Hill in the District of Nyanza Lac.

On 13 August 2018, a grenade attack committed by unknown assailants in Munzenze hill in the District of Kirundo killed a 55-year-old man Ndagijimana at Munzenze hill in the District of Kirundo.

On 13 August 2018, twenty-two (22) fishermen operating on a backwater called Kukameme were arrested by the police at Rusizi River in the District of Mutimbuzi. The fishermen are suspected to collaborating with armed groups and taken to Bubanza cells.

On 14 August 2018, pro-Rwasa FNL activist Mathieu Ndayisenga was violently assaulted and wounded by Imbonerakure militiamen in Bibara in the District of Mutumba.

On 16 August 2018, seven (7) young people were arrested in Gitega by NIS agents as they sought Economic Community of the Great Lakes (CEPGL) travel documents which allow travel to Rwanda or the Democratic Republic of Congo. The NIS didn't give any information about the reason of their arrest.

On 17 August 2018, sixteen (16) persons were arrested in a hotel of the center Mabanda in the South of Burundi. Those arrested are members of the Coalition of Churches for the Harvest and were on an evangelization mission in Mabanda with permission from local authorities.

On 17 August 2018, twenty (20) persons were arrested in Makamba as they participated in a training organized by the Burundi Leadership Training Program (BLTP), a national NGO well known to the authorities.

On 17 August 2018, a grenade attack committed by unknown assailants in Nyakazi hill in the District of Kibago wounded Léonce Ngabo and Ernest Kenguza.

On 19 August 2018, a 66-year-old man, Wilfried Nibigira, was killed by unidentified people at his home in Musigati District

On 20 August 2018, a 18 year old man Gilbert Bigirimana was killed by unidentified people at Mwimbiro Hill in Nyanza lac. Witnesses report that the victim was tied up and received several fatal blows to the head, and his body was subsequently suspended inside his house.

On 21 August 2018, Nahimana Jean Pierre aka Juma of Nyakuguma in the District of Rumonge was assaulted and wounded by the children of the Chief of Kigwena zone, Yollande Ntihakose.

On 22 August 2018, four pro-Rwasa FNL activists, namely Gabriel Ndikumana, Jean Paul Mpanzwenayo, Phanuel Ndayongeje and

Nsanzurwimo, were arrested at Rusenda hill in the District of Bukinanyana.

On 23 August 2018, ten (10) opposition activists with the UPD-Zigamibanga party were arrested in Makamba by the NIS. Six of them were transferred to the NIS offices in Bujumbura.

On 24 August 2018, eleven people were arrested by the police in Bubanza following a police search in Kidahwe neighborhood. Five were detained without charge.

On 25 August 2018, Ntaconsanze, Ryumugabe, Niyukuri and Barengayabo were arrested at Gihome hill, Muhendo zone, in the District of Ntega. Relatives report that these four men were sequestered at their home by members of imbonerakure militiamen who accompanied police agents. The militiamen fired them from their homes, then beat them up in the presence of several witnesses and police agents who came to arrest them. Relatives also report that the victims are all activists of FNL opposition party close to MP Agathon Rwasa

On 25 August 2018, a 70-year-old man Marc Nkuzimana was killed by unidentified persons at Rushanga hill in the District of Bugendana. Relatives reported that the victim had been beaten.

On 26 August 2018, Charlotte was murdered by unidentified people at her home on Nkondo sub-Hill, Nyabitsinda Hill in the District of Ruyigi. Witnesses report that the victim was beaten and then hanged in her house by her murderers.

On 30 August 2018, pro Rwasa FNL activist Donatien Ntakarutimana was arrested by the police at Bisaka hill in the District of Burambi.