



Burundi Monthly report

June 2018



Summary

The constitutional referendum held 17 May was characterized by a large number of arbitrary arrests mainly targeting members of the opposition *Amizero y'Abarundi*. As President Pierre Nkurunziza proclaimed the new constitution, he also pledged to step aside in 2020. But a considerable portion of the population remains opposed to this constitutional reform.

Burundi's two constitutions

On 17 May 2018, a constitutional referendum was held. It was widely opposed. Internal opposition to the constitutional change, mainly gathered in the *Amizero y'Abarundi* coalition, mobilized constituents to vote no, while the external opposition, mainly gathered in the coalition CENARED, called for a boycott.

Before the results were announced, the coalition *Amizero y'Abarundi* denounced massive fraud, threats and intimidation and urged the national electoral commission to nullify the vote. It further filed a case with the constitutional court. The application was dismissed, as the constitutional court decided that the referendum had been held according to the law and therefore confirmed the results on 31 May 2018.¹

Indeed on 7 June 2018, President Pierre Nkurunziza promulgated the new constitution at the presidential palace in Gitega before heading to

¹ See Arrêt RCCB 356 du 31 mai 2018 de la Cour constitutionnelle, available on <https://www.ceniburundi.bi/IMG/pdf/rcc356-2.pdf>

Bugendana, one of the districts of Gitega Province for official ceremonies. Bugendana is the location where Pierre Nkurunziza launched the constitutional revision project in December 2017. Ironically, Bugendana is also the site of a massacre in 1996 that killed between 300 and 684 Tutsi seeking shelter in an IDP camp² attributed to the rebel movement to which the current president belonged became the symbolic birthplace of a new constitution which removes key provisions guaranteeing ethnic balance.

These provisions are widely seen as critical to the physical and political survival of the minority Tutsi. In his speech, Pierre Nkurunziza stated that the constitution was not tailored to his personal needs. He announced that his presidential term would end in 2020 and that he would not seek re-election, instead supporting a successor nominated by this party³. He also declared that institutions elected in 2015 will remain in place until the end of their tenure in 2020 according to the 2005 constitution.

² See, for example, "Secretary-General Condemns Killings in Burundi; Calls on Parties to the Conflict to Cease Immediately Acts of Violence," 22 July 1996, available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/1996/19960722.sgsm6025.html> or Burundi Information, "En Memoire des 684 Tutsi Tués par le CNDD-FDD a Bugendana le 20.7.1996," 23 July 2016, available at <http://www.burundi-information.net/commemoration-des-obseques-des-rescapes-de-bugendana.html>.

³ See "Le Burundi désormais régi par une nouvelle constitution," Radio Television Nationale du Burundi, 8 June 2018, available at <http://www.rtnb.bi/fr/art.php?idapi=2/4/110>; Al Jazeera, "Burundi's Pierre Nkurunziza says he will step down in 2020," 7 June 2018, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/burundi-pierre-nkurunziza-step-2020-180607160413061.html>.



Pierre Nkurunziza making statement at Bugendana on 7 June 2018. Credit: ABP on twitter

Confusion remains about the Nkurunziza’s real intentions in stating that he would step down in 2020. The opposition coalition CNARED believes the announcement was just made to confuse people and reduce pressure on Nkurunziza and buy him time to strategically continue his plans.⁴

COMESA cancels summit in Burundi

The government of Burundi made visible preparations for the COMESA Summit⁵ scheduled to take place in Bujumbura from 1-10 June 2018. Officials claimed that the Summit would offer the “real image of a peaceful and prosperous Burundi.”



Flags and placards planted as Burundi prepares the COMESA Summit.

Credit: Azania Post

⁴ See “Burundi: Pierre Nkurunziza ne sera pas candidat en 2020 – réactions,” Deutsche Welle, 7 June 2018, available at <http://www.dw.com/fr/burundi-pierre-nkurunziza-ne-sera-pas-candidat-en-2020-r%C3%A9actions/a-4411135>.

⁵ In January, the government of Burundi announced its readiness to host COMESA summit, see <http://www.comesa.int/burundi-president-happy-with-summit-preps-2/>

However, the summit was postponed by COMESA, citing unexpected circumstances, and moved to Lusaka, Zambia despite the tremendous resources deployed by Burundi in preparation for the summit.⁶

A week before, Bujumbura had hosted the 72nd session of the African parliamentary union that afforded supporters of the regime the opportunity to promote Burundi's image. In effect, even before the meeting the President of the Union, Cypriano Cassama argued that his organization was to speak for Burundi and tell the true story about Burundi, whether to the UN, the AU or the EU.⁷ As Burundi struggles to renew its image, any action or gesture that could present another perspective becomes less and less tolerated.

For example, when the Brussels based European NGO coalition for the Central Africa EURAC organized a meeting to inform the European parliament about the situation in Burundi on 4 June 2018,⁸ the President of the Senate, Révérien Ndikuriyo, reacted in writing advising the EU parliament not to listen to members of civil society sought by the Burundian justice system.⁹ Meanwhile, a project dedicated to providing donkeys to poor families in the remote district of Nyarusange in the central province of Gitega were accused of undermining the relationship between France and Burundi as Burundi authorities considered the grant an insult.¹⁰

Human rights violations

⁶ See Burundi counts losses over axed Comesa meet, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Burundi-losses-cancelled-Comesa-Summit/2560-4580740-tubr26/index.html>

⁷ See La 72^{ème} Session de l'Union Parlementaire Africaine (UPA) se tient à Bujumbura, <http://www.rtnb.bi/fr/art.php?idapi=2/3/242>

⁸ Eurac recently published the report « Authoritarian abuses and covert elimination of dissident voices in Burundi.What the role of the European Union” available at http://www.eurac-network.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/Rapport_Burundi_EurAC_FINAL%20ENG.pdf

⁹ The letter was uploaded on the twitter of the Senate, https://twitter.com/burundi_senat/status/1002569139234508800

¹⁰ Burundi: Is Burundi a Nation of Lions Led By Donkeys? <http://allafrica.com/stories/201806030033.html>

On 17 May 2018, an FNL pro-Rwasa activist, Jean Claude Ndayiziga, was arbitrary arrested by Imbonerakure militiamen in Gihanga and handed to the commander of the Mudubugu military camp. Ndayiziga was then transferred to the NIS in Bujumbura

The same day, an FNL pro-Rwasa activist Pascal Ndikumazambo was arrested in Gitaza in the District of Muhuta by the Chief of the District. Ndikumazambo appears to have only arrested because of his political affiliation.

On the same day, three FNL pro-Rwasa activists Jacques Ndikumana, Mpanganze and Protais Ndayambaje from Bukinanyana were arrested by Imbonerakure militiamen, handed to local police and detained at Bukinanyana police station. Prior to the arrest, the Imbonerakure had threatened the three FNL pro-Rwasa activists. They appear to have been targeted only for their opposition to the referendum.

On 19 May 2018, an attack by unknown people using machetes at Nyamakarabo hill in the District of Mugina gravely wounded Pierre Bangirinama. Bangirinama had been threatened several times by unknown people who dropped off anonymous writings to his residence. He had informed the police of the threats.

On the same day, an attack by unknown gunmen on the residence of the priest of Nyabihanga parish in Mbogora gravely wounded Ildephonse Sabukwigina. Attackers entered the priests' residence and shot the victim three times before fleeing.

On 21 May 2018, an unidentified body was recovered at Mukaza near the Pentecostal church of Ntahagangwa. The victim had been beheaded.

On 22 May 2018, an FNL pro-Rwasa activist known as Albert and his father, whose name was not disclosed, were arrested by Imbonerakure militiamen in Magara, handed to local police and detained at Magara

police station. They appear to have been targeted only for their opposition to the constitutional referendum.

On 23 May 2018, a grenade attack in Bwambarangwe resulted in the wounding of Jean Pierre Ngerageze. Ngerageze has had tense relationship with Imbonerakure of the area who beat him in February this year.

On the same day, an attack by unidentified gunmen in a pub situated at Donge Burasira Hill in the District of Mugamba resulted in Kanjiori Joseph being killed.

On the same day, Anicet Bazira was abducted by unknown people from Muzye Hill in the District of Giharo and taken to unknown location. His whereabouts remain unknown.

On 24 May 2018, the dead body of a 65-year-old man, Joseph Niyokwizera, was recovered in the Nyamitanga sector at Crossroad II, in the Ndava zone, in the District of Buganda.

On the same day, three dead bodies of unidentified persons were found at the edge of Kibira Forest on Kibande Sub-Hill of the District of Mabayi Commune. Witnesses report that the victims were tied up and their bodies rotting.

On the same day, a 55-year-old man, Nicodème Nyandwi, was killed by unknown people on Rushimabarimyi Hill, in the District of Mugina.

On the same day, two activists, members of the opposition coalition *Amizero y'Abarundi*, in the District of Itaba, namely Mélance Ngenzebuhoro and Léonidas Sabokwigura, were arrested by the police in Itaba and detained at Itaba police station. The police have accused them of organizing an illegal meeting, but it is believed that they are rather being targeted for their activism.

On 25 May 2018, Phocas Nibaruta was abducted by NIS agents from Buhiga hospital in the District of Buhiga. Witnesses suggest that

Nibaruka responded to a call from people who were waiting for him at the entrance of the hospital where he is doing an internship. He was reportedly taken in a NIS car to an unknown location.

On 26 May 2018, a member of the opposition coalition *Amizero y'Abarundi*, Jean Marie Mbonihankuye, was assaulted by Imbonerakure militiamen at Muhororo Hill in the District of Makebuko. Mbonihankuye appears to have been targeted because of his political affiliation.

On the same day, Imbonerakure militiamen destroyed property belonging to members of the opposition coalition *Amizero y'Abarundi* situated at Butwe Hill in the District of Gatara. Witnesses report that the militiamen systematically destroyed fifteen small shops serving as barber salons. The owners of these businesses appear to have been targeted for their vote against the constitutional referendum of 17 May 2018.

On the same day, a man known as Pierre succumbed to his wounds after having been stabbed by unknown people a day before at Kabingo Hill in the District of Giharo.

On 28 May 2018, Imbonerakure militiamen of Kiri in the District of Bugabira attacked the residences of two FNL pro-Rwasa activists, Jean de Dieu Mbonyumugenzi and his neighbor Dieudonné Bigirimana. As the latter resisted, instead of arresting the attackers, the local police arrested the victims and detained them at Bugabira police station without mentioning what they were charged with.

On May 30, 2018, a grenade attack perpetrated by unknown people at Gisyo neighborhood in the District of Muha resulted in two persons being wounded.

On 31 May 2018, a grenade attack perpetrated by unknown people in a pub in Munyinya Hill in the District of Bugendana resulted in one person being killed.

On 1 June 2018, 80 Muslims (31 women and 49 men) were arrested in Kayanza and detained at Kayanza police commissariat. They were arrested while praying and are suspected of meeting with former president of the ruling CNDD-FDD, Hussein Radjabu, who lives in exile and opposes the regime.

On 6 June 2018, taxi driver Vincent Barishakarike was killed by unidentified at Buconyori Boulevard situated in the neighborhood of Ngagara. Testimonies suggest that he was shot dead by two people who pretended to be passengers as the shooting happened while leaving the cab. Barishakarike was a retired soldier who served as a driver in the office of the president.

On the same day, FNL pro-Rwasa leader Vincent Ndimubakunzi was gravely wounded by Imbonerakure who used a spear at Rukanka in the District of Rugombo.