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Burundi: a bloody first year of challenged presidency for Pierre Nkurunziza

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(Bujumbura, Paris) On July 21st 2015 Pierre Nkurunziza was elected president of the Republic of Burundi after an [highly challenged election](#), boycotted by the opposition and held in a context of widespread violations of fundamental freedoms. A year later, the regime is engaged in a repressive headlong rush with [genocidal dynamics](#) that has already made thousands of deaths, missing persons, arrested and tortured people and that drove more than 270 000 people to flee the country. Our organizations call upon the government to stop this mass repression and urge the international community to protect civilians and facilitate a political exit to the crisis.

The first year of P. Nkurunziza third term was marked by a deep security, political and humanitarian crisis. In less than a year, the CNDD-FDD [\[1\]](#) has become a de facto single party, which regulates public and private life. [Serious and massive human rights violations](#) against those suspected to be opponent to the regime have widespread and constantly multiplied: more than 1,000 people killed, 5,000 detained, 800 missing, hundreds tortured, dozens of women sexually assaulted, thousands arbitrary arrests. FIDH and ITEKA have also identified more than a dozen mass graves and secret places of detention and torture. Moreover, Tutsis are increasingly targeted by the repression of security services. They are supported by Imbonerakure, the youth league of the ruling party, which act on the entire territory as auxiliaries of the police, the army and the National intelligence Service (SNR) [\[2\]](#) .

« Burundi has sunk into violence, authoritarianism, arbitrary and impunity. Security forces and their auxiliary forces have received the authorisation to kill, torture and make disappear presumed regime opponents. Freedom spaces have been drastically reduced and the independent civil society and medias are gagged. This is the tragic record of Pierre Nkurunziza, one year after his challenged re-election at the presidency of the Republic of Burundi »

Karim Lahidji, FIDH president

Several hundreds of arbitrary arrests occur on the whole Burundian territory every week. This morning again, the police arbitrarily arrested an unknown number people in the Musaga district in Bujumbura. The day before, on July 20th, other arrests had taken place in Buringa in the western part of the country and also in Bujumbura the capital. Théodore Nsengiyumva, a former member of Burundian Armed Forces [\[3\]](#) (FAB) [\[4\]](#) and a local elected official of Agathon Rwasa's [\[5\]](#) National Liberation Front (FNL), was arrested with no warrant at his home in Buringa by police officers led by station chief Edouard Nibizi. On that same day and in the same province, pastor Gérard Nsabimana and his friend Aimable Nibaruta were also arbitrarily arrested by the police. According to our information, they are suspected by law enforcement of supporting rebels of the Rukoko plain's province. They are still detained in the Bubanza police station. In down-town Bujumbura, on July 20th, an unknown number of arbitrary arrests also occurred around noon.

For over a year, assassinations by unidentified gunmen and extrajudicial killings by Burundian security services are also common in Burundi. On July 13th, MP Hafsa Mossi [\[6\]](#), moderate figure of the CNDD-

FDD, was murdered in the neighbourhood of Gihosha, in the northeast of Bujumbura. Two gunmen shot her around 10:30 am while she was in her vehicle. She died in Bujumbura military hospital from her injuries. Sources close to the deceased claimed that she had recently been threatened by high-ranking officials of the regime.

Meanwhile, members of civil society still in Burundi and journalists continue to be the prime targets of the authorities. Our organizations are informed almost daily of threats, intimidations and sometimes attacks on human rights defenders working on the field or refugees abroad. [Marie-Claudette Kwizera](#), Treasurer of ITEKA, is still missing since December 10th 2015. In a year, we estimate that almost all representatives of human rights organizations have fled the country. Similarly, no media is allowed to broadcast free and independent information.

"Considering the on-going atrocities, the international community's response is not enough. The African Union and the UN must urgently deploy a civilian-military force able to protect civilians and commit Burundian authorities to dialogue with the independent opposition and civil society."

Anschaire Nikoyagize, president of ITEKA

From July 12th to 14th 2016, the second round of talks [7] between the government, the opposition, civil society and religious groups in Burundi should have been held in Arusha, Tanzania, under the auspices of the Uganda mediation, led by Benjamin Mkapa, former President of Tanzania. But Burundian authorities refused to negotiate with those they regard as "putschists" and to attend the opening ceremony. Among those present were some members of the main opposition coalition, the CNARED [8], including its president, Jean Minani. Members of civil society, as Pacifique Nininahazwe and Armel Niyongere, presidents of two human rights organizations, respectively FOCODE and ACAT-Burundi [9], also attended the event. In a tweet, Willy Nyamitwe, communication advisor of the presidency, stated that "Jean Minani, [Pacifique] Nininahazwe and Armel Niyongere were prosecuted and could not be invited to the dialogue" [10]. FIDH and ITEKA regret that these representatives were present without being able to dialogue with the government. Mediation has finally invoked an error in the invitations. Our organizations urge the international community and the Uganda mediation to ensure the holding of an inclusive and effective dialogue to get the country out of chaos.

P.S.

FIDH
ITEKA

Footnotes

[1] National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), ruling party since August 2005.

[2] See the FIDH statement "Burundi : Repression of a genocidal character, the UN's response must be strong", April 14 2016, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/burundi/burundi-repression-o-a-genocidal-character-the-un-s-response-must-be>

[3] Théodore Nsengiyumva had already been arrested two weeks before.

[4] Former army, mostly Tutsi. The ex-FAB have suffered a ferocious repression for a few months and particularly since March 2016 because of their ethnicity and their presumed opposition to the regime.

[5] The FNL is an opposition political party whose leader, Agathon Rwasa, is currently first vice-president of the National assembly. From the beginning of the crisis, its members have been subject to threats, intimidation, arbitrary arrests and detentions, attacks and extra-judiciary executions.

[6] Hafsa Mossi had successively been Minister of Communication and Government Spokeswoman (2005-2007), Minister to the East African Community Affairs (2009-2011). She had also been communication advisor to president Nkurunziza and journalist for the National Radio and Television of Burundi (RTNB) and for the BBC.

[7] After over a year of crisis, the international community has finally managed to initiate a political dialogue between the authorities and part of the opposition under the auspices of the East African Community in Arusha. The first step of the inter-Burundian dialogue was held in Tanzania from May 21st to 24th 2016. It was shape as a consultation of all stakeholders without any dialogue between parties.

[8] National Council for the respect of the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Burundi and the rule of law.

[9] Forum for Awareness and Development (FOCODE). FOCODE has launched the Campaign NDONDEZA against enforced disappearance in Burundi. See in particular <http://www.focode.org/> Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT). Armel Niyongere is also the leader of the SOS-Torture network Burundi that publishes regular reports on human rights violation in the country.

[10] Burundian justice has indeed issued international arrest warrants against them ins October 2015.