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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 - Burundi

Burundi emerged in 2008 from over a decade and a half of civil war between the army, drawn predominantly from the minority Tutsi group, and militias from the majority Hutu. During the war, women and girls of all ethnic groups were systematically targeted for violence by both sides. This violence did not stop with the cessation of hostilities. In May the outgoing Independent Expert of the UN Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Akich Okola, reported that gender-based violence had escalated year on year.

Also during the civil war, Batwa, caught in the middle between Hutu and Tutsi militants, both accusing them of loyalty to the other side, were killed in large numbers. They continue to face what the Independent Expert called 'systemic discrimination'. In October the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) urged Burundi to 'elaborate a plan of action to protect the rights of Batwa children', particularly marginalized girls. In May MRG published the results of research into the reasons for low enrolment and high drop-out rates of Batwa girls in primary and secondary education in Burundi. The report indicated that Batwa boys and girls from other ethnic groups are twice as likely to go to school as Batwa girls. Drop-out rates for Batwa girls are also double those for Batwa boys. Factors contributing to Batwa girls' lack of access to education include poverty, the attitude of Batwa parents towards the education of girls, and early marriage. Finally, violence and discrimination towards albinos also continues to occur, with at least three reportedly murdered in 2010.

Nevertheless, Burundi's Constitution does recognize 'minority groups', including ethnic, cultural and religious minorities. It also provides for proportionate ethnic representation in public enterprises, the National Assembly and the Senate. The explicit mention of Batwa as beneficiaries of this ethnic quota constitutes an important step forward for this ancient hunting and gathering community. Despite this, however, stereotyping and marginalization of Batwa people continues, restricting their involvement in political life.

Local, communal, legislative and presidential elections were all held in 2010. In the run-up to the elections, opposition parties reported intimidation and violence from both police and the youth wing of the party in power, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces de Défense de la Démocratie, CNDD-FDD), which had been formed from one of the main Hutu rebel groups active in the civil war. Other parties organized their own youth wings in response, at times with disaffected young ex-combatants. These groups, including that of the CNDD-FDD's closest rival the National Liberation Forces (FNL), were involved in numerous violent clashes.

The communal elections, held in May, went off peacefully, although Human Rights Watch reported at least five politically motivated killings in the weeks running up to them. The international community officially recognized their results; however opposition parties accused the government of fraud and formed a coalition, ADC-Ikibiri. They pulled their candidates from the presidential race, leaving President Pierre Nkurunziza of the CNDD-FDD unopposed. The beginning of the presidential campaign saw an increased level of violence with grenade and arson attacks mainly on ruling party offices, and killings of both ruling and opposition party activists. Some of the opposition parties boycotted legislative contests as well. The government declared the boycott illegal and banned opposition meetings. Scores of opposition activists were reportedly arrested, and three of their leaders were prevented from leaving the country. President Nkurunziza was inaugurated for a second term in August. His party also won most legislative and local posts.

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