

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	247
Land:	Burundi
Kilde:	Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
Titel:	The National Liberation Forces political party (FNL)
Udgivet:	16. marts 2017
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	2. juni 2017

[EN](#) | [DE](#)

- **Source:**
IRB - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
- **Title:**
Burundi: The National Liberation Forces (Forces nationales de libération, FNL) political party; the treatment of FNL members by the authorities (2015-February 2017) [BDI105752.FE]
- **Publication date:**
16 March 2017
- **ecoi.net summary:** Query response on the political party National Liberation Forces (FNL - Forces nationales de libération) (2015 - February 2017) [ID 338595]
- **Countries:**
Burundi
- **Original link** <http://www.irb.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=456986&pls=1>

Recommended citation:

IRB - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: Burundi: The National Liberation Forces (Forces nationales de libération, FNL) political party; the treatment of FNL members by the authorities (2015-February 2017) [BDI105752.FE], 16 March 2017 (available at [ecoi.net](http://www.ecoi.net))
http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/338595/468647_en.html (accessed 01 May 2017)



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Burundi: The National Liberation Forces (Forces nationales de libération, FNL) political party; the treatment of FNL members by the authorities (2015-February 2017) [BDI105752.FE]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. National Liberation Forces (FNL)

Sources describe the FNL as a former rebel group led by Agathon Rwasa (ACLED May 2016, 8; FIDH and Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 53). In a report published in 2016 on Burundi, the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) [1] and the Iteka Burundian Human Rights League (Ligue burundaise des droits de l'homme, Ligue Iteka) [2] state that the FNL laid down its arms in 2009 and was transformed into a political party and that some of its fighters joined the National Defense Forces (FIDH and Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 53). Similarly, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, the FNL spokesperson stated that the FNL political party [translation] “was sanctioned on 21 April 2009” (FNL 28 Feb. 2017). According to that same source, the political party [translation] “was very active in the protests against the [president's] third term” (FNL 28 Feb. 2017). That same source states that the FNL is established in [translation] “all corners of the country” (FNL 28 Feb. 2017). The joint report by the FIDH and the Ligue Iteka states that [FIDH and Ligue Iteka English version] “a branch of the FNL [led by Aloys Nzabampema] refused to lay down its arms and still operates in Burundi” (FIDH and Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 53).

According to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), an Internet site that codes the dates and locations of reported political violence and protest events in over 60 countries in Africa and Asia (ACLED n.d.), FNL activities largely take place in and around Bujumbura, “though also in Kirundo and elsewhere” (ACLED May 2016, 8). The same source states that the FNL is involved in combat against the CNDD-FDD [National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie), the party of the President of the Republic Pierre Nkurunziza (PHW 2015, 216-217)] and the *Imbonerakure* [members of the youth league of the ruling party (Human Rights Watch 19 Jan. 2017)] in the provinces of Kirundo, Bubanza, Cibitoke and Gitega (ACLED May 2016, 11).

1.1 FNL Membership Card

The FNL spokesperson wrote the following about the FNL membership card:

[translation]

It is yellow and folds in half. The first page has the party's emblem (red and a green circle inside of which there is an arc with a hoe on one side, a hammer on the other and a black arrow in the middle) [...].

Let me clarify that since May 2010, our permanence has been destroyed by the police and the Imbonerakure militia, [who] raided all the party's documents.

Since then, the party has not issued any party card and we are confronted with people who, nevertheless, use the cards to justify their membership in the FNL, when it is the authority that organizes this fraud by taking money. We are confronted with this type of problem [...] for example in Europe where individuals applying for asylum present falsified or stolen cards. Therefore, any membership card that is dated after 24 May 2010 is a stolen or falsified card because the FNL party no longer issues them, especially since these membership cards were confiscated by the authority in Bujumbura. (FNL 28 Feb. 2017)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Treatment of FNL Members by the Authorities

According to an article published in June 2016 by L'Œil de l'exilé, an online newspaper enabling exiled journalists in France to express themselves freely through the Internet (MDJ Sept. 2016), FNL President Agathon Rwasa, [translation] "was denied the ability to meet with the population in the provinces of Gitega, Citeboke and Karusi" (L'Œil de l'exilé 6 June 2016). Similarly, an article published in 2016 by Radio France internationale (RFI) states that since May 2016, the Burundian power has [translation] "formally prohibited [Agathon Rwasa] as first vice-president of the Assembly from continuing his visits that attracted enormous crowds inland" (RFI 1 Nov. 2016).

In an article published in 2016, RFI writes that the government increased [translation] "pressure on [FNL] militants" and that "about a hundred had been arrested in the last two months, according to its spokesperson" (RFI 1 Nov. 2016). Similarly, the ACLED writes that the FNL "faced many arrests" (ACLED May 2016, 8). According to an article published in September 2016 by L'Œil de l'exilé, the FNL spokesperson stated that heads of *collines* [hills], [translation] "over 60% of whom are FNL," are "abusively arrested" for "failing to collaborate with the Imbonerakure youth militia of the ruling party" (L'Œil de l'exilé 27 Sept. 2016). Similarly, IHS Markit, a company that offers, among other products, financial, legal and political coverage across over 200 countries (IHS Markit n.d.), reports an increase in the disruption of FNL meetings and an increase in the arrests of FNL activists in March and April 2016 (IHS Markit 18 Apr. 2016). That same source states that the police and the Imbonerakure beat up FNL activists during that period (IHS Markit 18 Apr. 2016).

In an article on Burundi published in January 2017, Human Rights Watch states that [Human Rights Watch English version] "since the start of the current crisis in April 2015, members of the Imbonerakure have arrested, beaten, or attacked FNL members across the country" (Human Rights Watch 19 Jan. 2017). Similarly, an article published in 2015 by African Arguments, an Internet site that publishes analyses of African current affairs and politics (African Arguments n.d.), reports that the government used "repressive measures" to manage the opposition and that many activists and prominent opposition figures, including FNL member Pontien Barutwanayo [former administrator of the commune of Isale in the province of Bujumbura (*Jeune Afrique* 24 Aug. 2015)], "have been assassinated" (African Arguments 6 Nov. 2015). According to an academic commentary published in 2016 by Jurist, a legal research website led by a law professor from the University of Pittsburgh (Jurist n.d.), the government sponsored "hostile acts" against FNL militants (Jurist 19 Jan. 2016).

In an article published in January 2017 by Médiapart, a [translation] "digital, independent and participatory news medium" (Médiapart n.d.), it is written that the FNL spokesperson [translation] "reported over 150 people arrested, tortured and then killed" in the three months prior to the publication of the article (Médiapart 25 Jan. 2017). An article published in October 2016 on the website of *Iwacu*, a Burundian press group (*Iwacu* n.d.), states the following:

[translation]

According to SOS-Torture and the Ligue Iteka, the situation is particularly worrying for members of the opposition parties in a number of locations in the country. "The proRwasa FNL militants are the most targeted. [F]rom 28 August [to] 15 September 2016, at least 69 of Agathon Rwasa's FNL militants were arrested, persecuted, tortured or forced to flee." (*Iwacu* 18 Oct. 2016)

According to the FNL spokesperson, over 500 cases of FNL members who had been killed or who had disappeared since April 2015 have been reported (FNL 28 Feb. 2017). Similarly, according to the ACLED, in July 2015, following the President's re-election for a third term, several FNL members were killed (ACLED May

2016, 13). According to the ACLED, FNL supporters were targeted in 13 percent of the incidents of violence that occurred against civilians where affiliation of the targeted civilian was known (ACLED May 2016, 4).

In its article published in January 2017, Human Rights Watch states that women had been victims of rape and sexual violence [Human Rights Watch English version] “because their husbands or male relatives were members of opposition parties such as the FNL” (Human Rights Watch 19 Jan. 2017). Similarly, according to a report of the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi (UNIIB) published in 2016,

[UN English version]

Many Burundian women and girls related to males who opposed the third term, or were perceived as political dissidents, became the targets of physical and sexual violence by elements of the security forces. (UN 20 Sept. 2016, para. 58)

2.1 Incidents Involving FNL Members and the Authorities

Sources report incidents involving FNL members and Burundian authorities, including the following:

- 16 FNL members were arrested in March 2016 in a bar in the province of Kirundo on the grounds that they were conducting an unauthorized political meeting (*Iwacu* 23 Mar. 2016; RFI 15 Mar. 2016; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2017, 4). In *World Report 2017*, Human Rights Watch states that they were arrested by ruling party officials, police and Imbonerakure (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2017, 4). According to the same source, [Human Rights Watch English version] “many more FNL members were arrested in later months” (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2017, 4).
- On 19 May 2016, Vincent Ndiokubwayo was beaten and injured by Imbonerakure in the commune of Gitanga, in the province of Rutana (Ligue Iteka May 2016, 10). According to on-site sources, the victim was an FNL member and was apparently mistreated for that reason (Ligue Iteka May 2016, 10). The victim wanted to file a complaint but [translation] “feared reprisals and the impunity enjoyed by Imbonerakure of CNDD-FDD” (Ligue Iteka May 2016, 10).
- Since 29 June 2016, Jimmy Nimbonera has been reported disappeared following his arrest by an Imbonerakure, police and military in the locality of Mubuga, in the province of Bururi (Ligue Iteka July 2016, 7). On-site sources stated that the victim had been accused by police and an Imbonerakure of being an FNL member (Ligue Iteka July 2016, 7).
- An article published by RFI reports the arrest of several FNL militants at the end of June 2016 in a number of provinces (RFI 29 June 2016). The same source states that [translation] “[l]ocal FNL officials were stopped in the province of Bururi and Ngozi, in the north” (RFI 29 June 2016). According to RFI, the Minister of the Interior confirmed that those measures had been taken by the governors of those provinces for security reasons (RFI 29 June 2016).
- On August 26, 2016, Jonas Mugara, [translation] “a very active FNL member,” was tortured and intimidated by a police commissioner in the commune of Gisagara, in the province of Cankuzo (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 29). The population in the locality stated that the victim, who [translation] “had repeatedly been a victim of persecution” because of his political membership, had fled (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 29).
- On 26 August 2016, seven militants of the FNL under Agathon Rwasa were arrested in the commune of Kinyinya, in the province of Ruyigi, by the provincial police commissioner who stated, according to testimony, that the party was [translation] “not recognized under legislation” (Ligue Iteka Aug. 2016, 18).
- On 4 September 2016, the homes of two members of the FNL under Agathon Rwasa, suspected of illegal possession of weapons, were searched by officers of the National Intelligence Service (Service national de renseignement) accompanied by Imbonerakure who tortured them and took them to the police station, when no weapons were found (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 47).
- On 20 September 2016, Abdoul Ndayishimiye, a member of the FNL under Agathon Rwasa, was kidnapped in the commune of Rugombo, in the province of Cibitoke, by some Imbonerakure; the victim stated that she was threatened for refusing to join the CNDD-FDD party (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 109).
- On 22 September 2016, a communal president and an official of the FNL under Agathon Rwasa were detained at the police station in the province of Kirundo for one week for [translation] “exchanging SMS messages about contributions to the CNDD-FDD” (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 37). One of the messages, discovered by a supporter of the CNDD-FDD, indicated the FNL supporters were not required to pay this contribution (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 37). The victims believe that they are victims because of their political membership (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 37).

- On 26 September 2016, five members of the FNL under Agathon Rwasa were arrested and detained in the commune and province of Rumonge, [translation] “accused of conducting an illegal meeting” (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 35). The Ligue Iteka writes that [translation] “political reasons were the basis for these arbitrary arrests, according to police and military sources who opposed them” (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 35).
- In September 2016, a number of FNL militants were arrested in the commune of Mutaho, in the province of Gitega (*Iwacu* 4 Oct. 2016). According to *Iwacu*, some inhabitants stated that [translation] “Imbonerakure from the Gerangabo, Nyangungu, Rurenge and Kinyinya collines gather at 6 p.m. to track down pro-Agathon Rwasa FNL members or to scare their families” (*Iwacu* 4 Oct. 2016). Relying on testimonies, *Iwacu* writes that [translation] “Imbonerakure and core administrators are accused of demanding money from the pro-Rwasa FNL militants” (*Iwacu* 4 Oct. 2016).
- On 25 October 2016, in the commune of Buhiga, in the province of Karusi, Viateur Niyongere, [translation] “accused of belonging to the FNL opposition party,” was “seriously tortured by some Imbonerakure,” and then taken to the police station (Ligue Iteka Oct. 2016, 14).
- militant of the FNL under Agathon Rwasa was killed on 29 October 2016 and five others were injured by some Imbonerakure in the province of Kayanza following a search conducted by the Imbonerakure at the home of two FNL militants (Ligue Iteka Oct. 2016, 9; Belga News Agency 30 Oct. 2016). According to the Belgian news agency Belga News Agency, the president of the FNL in the province of Kayanza is of the opinion that there exists [translation] “a desire to punish individuals whose political membership is different than that of the majority party” (Belga News Agency 30 Oct. 2016). According to an article published by RFI on the same incident, the version of the party opposition is not the same as that of the police, which report that six men were caught in the act and beaten to death for hours by local inhabitants (RFI 31 Oct. 2016).
- On 8 November 2016, in the province of Muramvya, three members of the provincial committee of the FNL loyal to Agathon Rwasa were arrested by the police for belonging to a political party not recognized under legislation and for conducting a meeting without the authorization of the local chiefs (Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 28). One of the members arrested stated that he was beaten at the police station because of his political membership (Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 19-20).
- The Ligue Iteka states that in the commune of Gihogazi, in the province of Karusi, according to on-site sources, some Imbonerakure began systematically destroying homes belonging to presumed opponents of the ruling power, including two members of the FNL under Agathon Rwasa (Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 58).
- On 11 December 2016, eight militants of the FNL under Agathon Rwasa were arrested in the commune of Mutimbuzi, in the province of rural Bujumbura, by some police officers accompanied by Imbonerakure who [translation] “accused them of conducting an illegal meeting to destabilize” the government (Ligue Iteka Dec. 2016, 16).
- The FNL spokesperson reports that some educators and teachers who are FNL members were arrested, [translation] “beaten up, bound [and] humiliated” for belonging to the FNL party (L’Œil de l’exilé 27 Sept. 2016).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The FIDH [FIDH English version] “is an international human rights NGO federating 184 organizations from 112 countries” (FIDH n.d.).

[2] The Ligue Iteka, created in 1991, is the [translation] “first Burundian human rights organization to be legally recognized and to have worked openly in Burundi” (Ligue Iteka n.d.). In January 2017, sources reported that the Burundian authorities prohibited the activities of the Ligue Iteka in Burundi (*Le Monde* 4 Jan. 2017; *Iwacu* 3 Jan. 2017).

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Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Burundi – government portal; Freedom House; International Crisis Group; IRIN News; *Jane's Intelligence Review*; United States – Department of State.