
BURUNDI 2025

More than 70% of the population lived below the poverty line. Security forces subjected perceived critics to arbitrary arrest and detention, and enforced disappearance. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment continued while perpetrators enjoyed impunity for past and recent abuses. Prison conditions remained dire. Peaceful dissent continued to be repressed and independent journalism threatened. Media workers were subjected to persistent harassment, intimidation and legal obstacles. Rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly were severely restricted, particularly around the election period. While women's representation in parliament increased, girls and women were not adequately protected from widespread gender-based violence.

Background

The year marked one decade since the 2015 political crisis, when peaceful demonstrations against the late President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to seek a third term were met with brutal repression by security forces. The June 2025 legislative and local elections were marked by restrictions on opposition parties. The ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party won all National Assembly and Senate seats. During the election period, key state institutions, including the judiciary and the electoral commission, remained subject to significant influence from the CNDD-FDD.

Burundi's military operations in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) raised human rights concerns. Insecurity in the DRC resulted in the arrival of large numbers of refugees to Burundi, increasing pressure on already limited humanitarian resources and host communities.

Relations with Rwanda remained tense. Burundi accused Rwanda of planning attacks on its territory.

Economic and social rights

According to the World Bank more than 70% of the population lived below the poverty line, with limited access to essential services and employment

opportunities.

A protracted fuel shortage placed additional strain on economic and social systems, disrupting transport and healthcare services, and food supply chains. Shortages resulted in significant increases in the price of basic goods and services, further increasing the cost of living.

In March the government integrated malaria vaccination into its routine immunization programme. This was a significant public health initiative given that malaria was a leading cause of morbidity and mortality, with an estimated 3.7 million cases in 2021, resulting in 5,957 deaths. However, limitations in health infrastructure and logistical capacity continued to impede comprehensive vaccination.

Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances

Human rights organizations accused the National Intelligence Service (SNR) and police forces of arbitrarily arresting and detaining individuals viewed as government critics, more than 20 of whom were forcibly disappeared according to the NGO Forum for Awareness and Development.

In August, men believed to be SNR officers arrested YouTuber and government critic Dieudonné Niyukuri, along with Fabrice Ribwurumutima (a Rwandan national), Eloi Nkurunziza and Venant Ndikumana. Authorities did not disclose their fate and whereabouts or provide any reasons for the arrests, despite repeated requests for information from civil society and family members.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Local human rights organizations received reports of the use by security forces of torture and other ill-treatment. The lack of investigations into such allegations perpetuated a climate of fear and impunity.

According to NGO SOS Torture/Burundi, in March the Regional Police Commissioner for the Northern Region beat Septime Ndikuriyo, a motorcycle taxi driver, until he lost consciousness. Witnesses told the NGO that the officer intercepted Septime Ndikuriyo in Rusuguti, a commune in Ngozi province, and accused him of overtaking his vehicle. Septime Ndikuriyo was taken to Ngozi Regional Hospital where he was admitted to the intensive care unit. The officer was not subjected to disciplinary or legal action or even investigated for the alleged attack.

Between May and June, the UN Committee against Torture issued key decisions on the cases of five complainants who said they had been subjected to grave violations under the UN Convention against Torture between 2014 and 2016. In each case, the Committee found Burundi responsible for torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment committed by police or intelligence officers.

The findings illustrated the entrenched patterns of torture, denial of torture, impunity, and the lack of commitment to justice and accountability. For many years, the Committee had highlighted structural flaws in Burundi's justice system,

including the absence of an independent complaints mechanism, the use of arbitrary detention, denial of access to legal and medical assistance, and a judiciary that lacked independence.

Burundi did not provide a meaningful response to the Committee's findings.

Detainees' rights

Prisons were overcrowded and conditions remained harsh with inadequate food, sanitation and medical care provided. The NGO Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture in Burundi said the prison population was 400% above capacity. Civil society organizations documented cases of detainees being held beyond their sentences.

Freedom of expression

Press freedom remained severely restricted, with journalists and media organizations subjected to persistent harassment, intimidation and legal obstacles.

In March the National Communication Council suspended Yaga Burundi, a youth-focused online media platform. The suspension was lifted more than two weeks later following a public outcry.

In April, journalists Willy Kwizera of Radio Bonesha FM and Masudi Mugiraneza of Radio Scolaire Nderagakura were arrested, detained and interrogated for their coverage of a demonstration, before being released without charge hours later.

Journalist Sandra Muhoza remained in prison at the end of the year. Arrested in March 2024 for a message she posted on WhatsApp, she was convicted and sentenced by a court in Bujumbura province in December 2024 to 21 months in prison for undermining the integrity of national territory and inciting ethnic hatred. In May 2025 her appeal against the conviction went before the appeal court in Bujumbura, which said it lacked jurisdiction to hear the case because her alleged offence took place in another province, namely Ngozi. This decision effectively nullified her original conviction and sentence. In September she was transferred to a prison in Ngozi and in October her case went before the Ngozi Court of Appeal, which was expected to decide within 48 hours whether she should be provisionally released. No such decision was made public by the end of the year.

Right to information

Significant barriers were imposed on access to official information for independent media outlets and journalists. Reports of journalists being denied access to parliamentary sessions from August onwards included two Iwacu newspaper journalists who were refused entry in September because they "were not on the list". According to Iwacu, some journalists were removed from WhatsApp groups that had served as official communication channels between the National Assembly and the press. Meanwhile, live broadcasts of key parliamentary sessions were taken

off air. The Constitution stipulates that National Assembly and Senate sessions are public except under exceptional circumstances.

Freedom of association and assembly

Authorities imposed restrictions on the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. They banned or disqualified opposition parties from participating in political activities and electoral processes ahead of the elections.

In January, the Constitutional Court upheld a lower court's decision to invalidate the composition of the Burundi Bwa Bose (Burundi for All) coalition of opposition parties. The ruling effectively excluded members of the opposition National Congress for Liberty party who remained loyal to their former leader Agathon Rwasa from standing in the elections. Agathon Rwasa was replaced in March 2024 with a leader believed to be close to the ruling party.

Opposition party members and supporters, and activists, were harassed, intimidated and physically attacked, often by members of the Imbonerakure, the ruling party's youth wing, and other government-aligned groups.

From March onwards, several Burundi Bwa Bose coalition meetings were banned across the country. In May supporters of the coalition reported that alleged Imbonerakure members seized their motorcycle in the capital, Gitega, following a march.

In November President Ndayishimiye publicly insulted Faustin Ndikumana, the president of Words and Action for the Awakening of Conscience and the Evolution of Mindsets, a human rights NGO and one of the few remaining independent organizations still operating in Burundi. President Ndayishimiye claimed Faustin Ndikumana was "possessed by demons" and mocked him for being unmarried.

Bans and suspensions, imposed in 2016 against most independent human rights organizations in the aftermath of the 2015 crisis, remained in place, as did criminal proceedings against some human rights defenders. Organizations affected included the Association for the Protection of the Human Rights and Detained Persons, Ligue Iteka and the Burundian Union of Journalists. Most independent human rights defenders and activists remained in exile, with their organizations operating from abroad. Such measures undermined the ability to monitor human rights violations and support victims effectively.

Women's and girls' rights

Women's representation in the 2025-2030 legislature increased significantly following the elections, with 39% and 46% of seats held by women in the National Assembly and the Senate, respectively. This was a respective increase of 4% and 5% compared to the 2020-2025 legislature.

However, women and girls continued to experience widespread gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual abuse. As of 18 December, the Movement of Women and Girls for Peace and Security in Burundi had recorded 84 cases of

sexual violence, 41 cases of physical violence and 105 killings, which included killings and sexual abuse against children. Levels of violence were exacerbated by weak enforcement of existing laws and persistent impunity for perpetrators.

While the contraceptive injection was authorized, access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and rights remained limited. This was particularly so in rural areas, due to poor health infrastructure and prevailing social taboos.