

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	244
Land:	Burundi
Kilde:	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
Titel:	. Burundi: The authorities' treatment of political opponents.
Udgivet:	8. marts 2017
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	2. juni 2017

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

- **Source:**
IRB - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
- **Title:**
Burundi: The authorities' treatment of political opponents; the authorities' treatment of members of the political party known as Movement for Solidarity and Democracy (Mouvement pour la solidarité et la démocratie, MSD) (2015-February 2017) [BDI105751.FE]
- **Publication date:**
08 March 2017
- **ecoi.net summary:** Query response on treatment of political opponents by authorities, especially treatment of members of the political party Movement for Solidarity and Democracy (MSD - Mouvement pour la solidarité et la démocratie) (2015 - February 2017) [ID 338177]
- **Countries:**
Burundi
- **Original link** <http://www.irb.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=456981&pls=1>

Recommended citation:

IRB - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: Burundi: The authorities' treatment of political opponents; the authorities' treatment of members of the political party known as Movement for Solidarity and Democracy (Mouvement pour la solidarité et la démocratie, MSD) (2015-February 2017) [BDI105751.FE], 08 March 2017 (available at ecoi.net)
http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/338177/468144_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 authorities' treatment of political opponents; the authorities' treatment of members of the political party known as Movement for Solidarity and Democracy (Mouvement pour la solidarité et la démocratie, MSD) (2015-February 2017) [BDI105751.FE]

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1. The Authorities' Treatment of Political Opponents

According to the annual report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Burundi (OHCHR-Burundi), which was published in 2016, the criterion of [UN English version] "undermining public order" has been "used systematically" by the authorities since April 2015 to prevent opposition political parties in particular from obtaining prior authorization under the law to hold a meeting, demonstration or rally (UN 17 June 2016, para. 44). Furthermore, according to the Amnesty International (AI) report on the state of the world's human rights, which was published in 2016, [AI English version] "activities by political opposition parties and civil society organizations were restricted [in Burundi]" (AI 2016, 127). The same source indicates that on April 24, 2015, [AI English version] "the Minister of Interior banned all demonstrations" (AI 2016, 127).

The Report of the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi (UNIIB) notes that after April 2015, there was an increase in the number of arbitrary arrests and detention of individuals who were protesting against a third term for the president (UN 20 Sept. 2016, para. 65). The same source notes the following:

[UN English version]

SNR [National Intelligence Services], the PNB [Burundi National Police], the Imbonerakure [youth league of the party in power, some of whom work closely with security forces (UN 17 June 2016, 3)] and the FDN [National Defence Forces] reportedly tracked down opponents, notably through cordon and search operations and raids in so-called opposition neighbourhoods of Bujumbura. (UN 20 Sept. 2016, para. 65)

In addition, according to a report on Burundi that was published in 2016 by Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), a website that codes the dates and locations of political violence and protest events in more than 60 countries in Africa and Asia (ACLED n.d.), after December 2015, the police carried out

[ACLED English version] "searches, raids, and arrests throughout Bujumbura" (ACLED May 2016, 6). In its report on Burundi that was published in 2017, Human Rights Watch states that [Human Rights Watch English version] "[s]cores of opposition party members have been arrested, ill-treated, and illegally detained, and other detainees taken to unknown destinations," yet arrest warrants were almost never produced by the police (Jan. 2017, 4). Relying on testimony, UNHCR indicates that the individuals arrested by security forces were allegedly sorted [UN English version] "according to their presumed collaboration with armed opposition groups or involvement in the movement against the third term" (UN 20 Sept. 2016, para. 66). The UNHCR report states that security forces used extortion, asking for [UN English version] "ransoms" to be paid to middle men to obtain the release of detainees (UN, para. 67). OHCHR-Burundi writes the following:

[UN English version]

November 2015 was characterized by an increase in the number of police operations in the parts of Bujumbura considered to be opposition neighbourhoods (Musaga, Mutakura, Jabe, Ngagara and Nyakabiga), following President Nkurunziza's ultimatum ordering people illegally possessing weapons to surrender them. This crackdown was accompanied by a new wave of arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment. Members of the police, the National Intelligence Service and the riot squad were the main alleged perpetrators of these violations [...] December 2015 saw the emergence of cases of enforced disappearance and sexual violence, attributed to police personnel, members of the military and the Imbonerakure. (UN 17 June 2016, para. 7)

In addition, according to the AI report published in 2017 on the state of the world's human rights, reports of forced disappearances, [AI English version] "often implicating the National Intelligence Services (SNR), continued" (AI 21 Feb. 2017, 128).

Sources report that security forces used torture and other forms of ill-treatment against those in opposition to a third term (AI 2016, 129; UN 20 Sept. 2016, para. 53). The UNHCR report confirms that torture was also used against relatives of opposition members (UN 20 Sept. 2016, para. 53). The same source notes that the presumed perpetrators are elements of the SNR, the PNB, the Imbonerakure and, to a lesser extent, the FDN as well as senior figures in the security establishment, who [UN English version] "have been repeatedly cited" during testimony (UN 20 Sept. 2016, para. 53).

The UNHCR report indicates that of the 564 cases of executions, [UN English version] "the large majority of victims have been identified as people who were opposed or perceived to be opposed to the third mandate of President Nkurunziza or of members of opposition parties" (UN 20 Sept. 2016, para. 38-39). Similarly, OHCHR-Burundi reports that between April 26, 2015, and the end of April 2016, there were 348 documented cases of extrajudicial executions, the main alleged perpetrators of which were police officers, members of the SNR and members of the riot squad, and there were eight documented extrajudicial executions that were allegedly carried out by the Imbonerakure (UN 17 June 2016, para. 10). The same source states that [UN English version] "[t]he victims were for the most part civilians, mainly members of the opposition and civil society opposed to a third term in office for Nkurunziza" (UN 17 June 2016, para. 10).

1.1 Treatment of Women Associated with the Opposition

OHCHR-Burundi reports that [UN English version] "since 2016 [...] the number of women arrested has increased" (UN 17 June 2016, para. 20). According to that same source, some of the women interrogated by police or SNR officers were sometimes [UN English version] "coerced [...] through verbal threats, intimidation and detention into denouncing opposition members in possession of illegal firearms," while others were allegedly forced to confess that they were opposition members (UN 17 June 2016, para. 20).

ACLED indicates that there are cases of women who were raped or killed outside of the capital (ACLED May 2016, 6). The same source indicates that it may be a tactic to prevent women from supporting opposition forces (ACLED May 2016, 6). The report published by Human Rights Watch in 2017 indicates that the Imbonerakure and police officers [Human Rights Watch English version] "sometimes armed with guns, sticks or knives, raped women whose male family members were perceived government opponents" (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2017, 3). Similarly, according to the UNHCR report, [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). In an article published in 2016, Human Rights Watch reports that in August 2015, a 17-year-old victim whose father was a member of MSD, was raped by the Imbonerakure (Human Rights Watch 27 July 2016). The same source indicates that after failing to find an MSD member who had been detained several times in December 2015, four soldiers kidnapped his wife and detained her in the barracks in Kamenge, where two of them raped and beat her (Human Rights Watch 27 July 2016).

2. The Authorities' Treatment of MSD Members

The Burundian League for Human Rights (Ligue burundaise des droits de l'homme, Ligue Iteka) indicates that [translation] "according to MSD party spokesperson, Epitace Nshimirimana, the CNDD-FDD [National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy (Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces de défense de la démocratie) (the party in power)] is planning on eliminating MSD members" (Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 14). The BBC reports that an MSD representative informed Radio France internationale (RFI) that since the start of the protests [against the president's third term], those who are in prison, and even those who have died, are, for the most part, MSD members (BBC 20 Oct. 2015a). In its report published in 2016, ACLED reports that the MSD was facing arrests (May 2016, 8).

An academic commentary published in 2016 by Jurist, a legal research website led by a law professor at the University of Pittsburgh (Jurist n.d.), states that [Jurist English version] "government sponsored hostile acts" were carried out against MSD members (ibid. 19 Jan. 2016). According to ACLED, MSD supporters were targeted in 12 percent of the violent incidents where the civilian's affiliation was known (ACLED May 2016, 4). ACLED specifies that in cases where MSD leaders and activities were targeted, primarily by unidentified armed groups, 74 percent of the incidents involved at least one fatality (ACLED May 2016, 4). In addition, in its global report on Burundi published in 2016, Human Rights Watch writes that MSD members were killed [Human Rights Watch English version] "in what appeared to be reprisal attacks" (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2016, 3).

Sources mention certain incidents involving MSD members and security forces, including the following:

- In June 2015, a female MSD member sought refuge outside the country after learning from MSD lawyers and senior members that she was being sought by the SNR (FIDH and Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 56). Since her departure, she has allegedly received threats on three occasions from Burundians (FIDH and Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 56).
- On 1 July 2015, four people were killed at a property where an MSD member was living (Human Rights Watch 6 Aug. 2015). That individual, who helped organize the protests [against the president's third term], [Human Rights Watch English version] "said he believed the police were looking for him at the time of the raid" (Human Rights Watch 6 Aug. 2015).
- On July 6, 2015, Pacifique Masabarakiza, allegedly an MSD supporter and [translation] "identified as a leader of the protests organized in Musaga in opposition to the president's third term," was arrested by police (Iwacu 6 July 2015).
- On the night of 18 and 19 July 2015, Déo Nshimirimana, an MSD member, was killed in Nyakabiga, [translation] "under undetermined circumstances" (Savoir News 21 July 2015). According to a senior MSD member, he [translation] "had left the area [central Gitega province] after receiving threats and avoiding police arrest" (Savoir News 21 July 2015).
- On 13 July 2015, Benjamin Mbonimpa and Emmanuel Harimenshi, MSD members who had received death threats, were found dead (Iwacu 13 July 2015). According to Iwacu, a news website on Burundi (Iwacu n.d.), sources indicate that the victims [translation] "were being sought, likely by SNR officers and police," that a raid had taken place on 2 July 2015 at Benjamin Mbonimpa's home, and that Emmanuel Harimenshi had once been kidnapped and then released (Iwacu 19 July 2015).
- In October 2015, Charlotte Umugwaneza was found dead outside of Bujumbura (RFI 18 Oct. 2015; Iwacu 15 Mar. 2016; ACLED May 2016, 13). ACLED indicates that the victim's body showed signs of torture (ACLED May 2016, 13). According to Iwacu, Charlotte Umugwaneza, MSD vice president for the Cibitoke area, was allegedly killed for political reasons (Iwacu 15 Mar. 2016). The presumed perpetrators are the SNR (FIDH and Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 57; BBC 20 Oct. 2015b).
- On 30 April 2016, Egide Niyubahwe, a leader of the MSD party, was arrested by police officers accompanied by the Imbonerakure in the Nyakabigal commune of Bujumbura (Ligue Iteka May 2016, 11). The ITEKI league states that [translation] "the victim was sought because she was very active in the protests opposing a third term for President Pierre Nkurunziza" (Ligue Iteka May 2016, 11).
- On 12 May 2016, Prime Ndayishimiye, an MSD member, was arrested (Iwacu 24 May 2016). Iwacu indicates that according to testimonies, he was arrested by SNR officers because he participated in protests opposing the president's third term (Iwacu 24 May 2016). The victim's relatives, not having been informed of where he was being detained, [translation] "spoke out against his arbitrary arrest for his political beliefs" (Iwacu 24 May 2016).
- On 27 May 2016, a professor named Denis, an MSD member, was arrested and detained by the police (Ligue Iteka May 2016, 16; Iwacu 9 June 2016). The victim's relatives indicate that Denis' political affiliation explains his arrest (Iwacu 9 June 2016; Ligue Iteka May 2016).

- On 12 June 2016, Nancy Iarukundo, an active member of the MSD, received a threatening anonymous telephone call telling her to quit the party (Ligue Iteka July 2016, 8). On 2 July 2016, she was assaulted by an Imbonerakure (Ligue Iteka July 2016, 8).
- On 28 June 2016, the police arrested six members of the MSD in the Ndava commune of Mwaro province during a search operation (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 82). The MSD members were allegedly detained by police (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 82).
- On 20 July 2016, Emmanuel Nibaruta, an MSD representative in the Gihanga commune in Bubanza province, was arrested by the police but they did not have a warrant for his arrest (Ligue Iteka n.d., 18). He was allegedly accused of [translation] "facilitating and participating in rebel attacks" (Ligue Iteka n.d., 18).
- On 1 August 2016, Libérate Mpfagutunga, a female MSD member, was found dead in a river in the Busiga commune of Ngozi province (Ligue Iteka Aug. 2016, 8). She was allegedly killed by the Imbonerakure because of her political affiliation (Ligue Iteka Aug. 2016, 8).
- Since 16 September 2016, Glorioso Kwizera, an MSD representative and assistant to the MSD president in the urban Kinindo area, has been missing after she was arrested by SNR officers (Ligue Iteka Sept. 2016, 16). Sources report that she was allegedly tortured (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 21-22).
- On 19 September 2016, three Imbonerakure stole some money from a youth member of the MSD and then beat her; the victim was hospitalized (Ligue Iteka July-Sept. 2016, 109).
- On 14 October 2016, Patience Bukeyenzeza, an MSD member, accused of espionage, was tortured in the Mishiha commune by the area chief and the Imbonerakure; he was allegedly injected with an unknown substance (Ligue Iteka Oct. 2016, 15). He was taken to the hospital in critical condition and his lower extremities were paralyzed (Ligue Iteka Oct. 2016, 15).
- On 17 November 2016, Jean Claude Nduwayezu, an MSD member, was poisoned in Mpimba central prison (Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 14). The presumed perpetrators were two Imbonerakure who were allegedly [translation] "mandated to poison prisoners who were known to be political opponents" (Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 14). The victim was arrested in March 2014 during protests against the president's third term (Ligue Iteka Nov. 2016, 14).
- On 8 December 2016, in the Mukike commune in rural Bujumbura province, Léopold Ndikubwayo, Edige Nsengiyumva and Déo Nkuzimana, MSD members, were arrested and driven to the police station after a search operation, but nothing was found at their home (Ligue Iteka Dec. 2016, 19).
- On 9 December 2016, Lionel Nduwimana, an MSD member, was tortured in the Kanyosha commune of rural Bujumbura province by [translation] "a group of young Imbonerakure who were on night patrol" in order to extract information from him (Ligue Iteka Dec. 2016, 13).

An article published in 2016 by Xinhua, a Chinese news website (Xinhua n.d.), indicates that Burundi's Minister of Public Safety, Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni, accused Alexis Sinduhije, MSD president, of being among [translation] "the main sources of insecurity" in Burundi (Xinhua 13 Apr. 2016). In addition, Pan African News Agency (PANA), an online "information portal on Africa" (PANA n.d.), notes that an administrative report cites Alexis Sinduhije as the reason for [translation] "the continuing insecurity in Burundi" (PANA 17 Apr. 2016).

On 23 January 2017, hundreds of people, including 58 MSD members who had been arrested in March 2014, were released following a presidential pardon (All Africa 25 Jan. 2017; Iwacu 23 Jan. 2017).

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.

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Internet sites, including: BBC; Burundi – government portal; Freedom House; International Crisis Group; *Political Handbook of the World 2015*; Reuters; United States, Department of State.

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