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Conflict around land, sharpened by population growth and the scarcity of arable land, continued in Burundi during 2014. The government established a Land Commission on 31 December 2013, with a special court to deal with land issues subsequently established in April. These measures were perceived by some as potentially prioritizing the interests of repatriated citizens, primarily members of the Hutu majority, with the risk of creating further friction with the Tutsi minority.

Tensions have been further heightened by upcoming presidential elections, set for June 2015. Observers have called for an official investigation into claims that the military had supplied arms to the youth wing of the ruling party, the Hutu-dominated National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces (CNDD-FDD), which has been accused of political violence, intimidation and even killings of opposition supporters. These warnings came within a broader climate of repression against perceived government opponents. Following a one-day mass trial in March that failed to respect defendants' rights to due process, 48 people, mainly activists from one opposition party, were given sentences ranging from two years to life imprisonment. Some had been arrested in clashes with police, others while jogging; the authorities claimed that the latter were planning to converge and stage an unauthorized political demonstration.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly passed a law establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in April. The TRC is mandated to investigate past human rights abuses carried out during the country's various episodes of inter-ethnic violence between its Hutu majority and Tutsi minority since independence. Its commissioners include six Hutus, four Tutsis and one Twa. They were selected and sworn in to their positions in December. Critics noted that the government had disregarded some of the recommendations of the public consultation process, with implications for the credibility of the TRC, the involvement of civil society organizations and its accessibility to victims of all ethnic groups and political affiliations.

A court enquiry into the massacre of more than 150 Tutsi refugees, primarily women and children from South Kivu, DRC, at the Gatumba UNHCR site in Burundi ten years ago, opened on 1 December. Responsibility for the attack was claimed by the largely Hutu rebel group National Liberation Forces (*Forces nationales de libération*, FNL). In 2014, Burundi's army reportedly clashed several times with the FNL in South Kivu.

Burundi's population is still largely rural, with only one in ten people living in urban areas. Burundi is highly vulnerable to natural hazards: the capital Bujumbura, on the shores of a lake surrounded by steep hills, faced severe flooding and mudslides following heavy rains in February 2014. At least 68 people were killed and 20,000 displaced, including residents of the city's precarious shanty towns, home to many poor and marginalized groups including returning refugees from DRC previously displaced by the country's ethnic conflict. The government has attempted to provide vulnerable urban residents, including landless, displaced or returning groups, with secure housing through the establishment of planned 'peace villages' that include a mix of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa residents to promote social harmony and inter-ethnic interaction. Some of these settlements are located on Bujumbura's outskirts. While they face a number of challenges, they represent Burundi's ambition towards ethnic integration – an important development for a country where, during the conflictive 1990s, many neighbourhoods in Bujumbura divided along ethnic lines, with residents driving out neighbours of the opposing ethnicity and other, ethnically mixed neighbourhoods saw violent combat between Tutsi and Hutu militias. According to a 2013 study, the record of the peace villages is mixed, with at least some inhabitants facing social exclusion and experiencing tensions with surrounding communities.

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