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GENEVA (**Issued as received**) – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein on Monday reported an alarming upsurge in arrests, detention and killings in Burundi since the beginning of September.

"Almost every day, dead bodies are found lying on the streets of some of Bujumbura's neighbourhoods. In many cases, the victims appear to have been killed by a bullet fired at close range. The bodies sometimes show signs of torture and are typically found with their hands tied behind their backs," Zeid said.

"Reports suggest that many of these people had been arrested by the police or by the National Intelligence Agency (SNR) prior to their deaths. This succession of unexplained killings, and the widespread perception that they may be linked to State institutions, is instilling a deep sense of fear within the population, especially in neighbourhoods known to be supportive of the opposition," he added.

Since April 2015, the UN Human Rights Office has registered 134 killings as well as hundreds of cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, including 704 arrests since the beginning of September alone. In many cases, people are released after a few days. However, others sometimes stay in pre-trial detention for months on end, far beyond the maximum duration allowed by national and international law.

"We have seen an intensification of search operations allegedly aimed at seizing illegal weapons, in specific neighbourhoods of Bujumbura and in other parts of the country," the High Commissioner said. "Young adults seem to be particularly targeted, with many of them alleging they were accused by the authorities of intending to join rebel groups based in neighbouring countries."

"In Bujumbura, the police often surround a specific neighbourhood, blocking all entry and exit points while they carry out their searches. Given these searches sometimes continue for several days, this method raises serious concerns with regard to freedom of movement," Zeid said. Consistent accusations of looting and destruction of property by police during such search operations have been received from diverse sources.

"My Office has documented more than 90 cases of torture since April 2015," Zeid said. "We have also been receiving many allegations of torture carried out by the police or the SNR, with the reported aim of forcing victims to confess to participation in an armed rebellion. The perpetrators of both torture and killings appear, to date, to have enjoyed absolute impunity."

"Because crimes as serious as extrajudicial executions and torture are going unpunished, more people are looking to take the law into their own hands. There is an increasing risk that spiralling tit-for-tat violence will plunge the country back into its bloody past," Zeid said, noting that his team in Burundi has documented incidents of targeted attacks on members of the opposition and civil society on one hand, as well on members and supporters of the ruling CNDD-FDD party, their families, high-level Government officials and military leaders on the other.

The large number of arrests has resulted in overcrowding and deteriorating living conditions in prisons. Mid-September, some 87 civilians illegally detained in Mabanda military camp in Makamba province were finally either released or transferred to a regular prison, following advocacy efforts by the UN Human Rights Office team on the ground.

The High Commissioner also expressed concern at the situation of 52 minors who are detained alongside adults during the day in Rumonge Central Prison. He urged the Burundian authorities to transfer them to a nearby re-education centre for children.

Zeid also noted that the security situation negatively affects the daily lives of ordinary citizens, especially when it comes to their rights to education and health, and has further weakened the country's already fragile economy. Many business have closed down or have been operating at a reduced pace.

Zeid stressed the importance of the ongoing cooperation with the Burundian authorities and urged them to fight

against impunity.

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