



To all United Nations Security Council Members

23 December 2015

Dear Ambassador

Re: Human rights situation in Burundi

We are writing to urge the United Nations Security Council to take swift action to prevent a further deterioration of the human rights situation in Burundi in the light of an escalation of violence in the last few days. We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to deploy Special Adviser Jamal Benomar and his support team to Burundi in order to pursue efforts to end the crisis. However, we believe a more robust response is needed. As UN Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Simonovic recently stated, "Action from the Council thus far has not been proportionate to the threat."

In the most serious incident to date, at least 100 people were killed on 11 December. These included some people whom security forces reportedly took from their homes and summarily executed after armed groups attacked military camps and security forces engaged in gun battles with armed youth in neighborhoods. The actual number of dead is unknown but the total could be much higher than current estimates. According to the UN, more than 400 people have been killed and nearly 220,000 people have fled the country since April. Despite UN Security Council Resolution 2248, the Burundian security forces continue to commit extrajudicial killings and other abuses with impunity. Armed groups associated with the political opposition are also allegedly responsible for killings and other attacks – especially against security forces or ruling party members -- contributing to a vicious cycle of violence and retaliation. Ordinary Burundians across the country are living in fear of what might come next as the situation deteriorates.

Meanwhile, space for dissenting voices continues to shrink. Several human rights defenders and their family members have been targeted and killed. Many journalists and human rights defenders have fled the country. Since 23 November, the government suspended the activities and froze the bank accounts of more than 10 NGOs, including the prominent human rights organization APRODH. On 10 December, Marie Claudette Kwigera, the treasurer of Ligue Iteka, was reportedly taken away by the Burundian intelligence agency. Freedom of expression has been severely restricted since the authorities suspended all the main private radio stations in May and threatened a number of leading journalists with prosecution.

It is crucial that the Security Council not wait for the situation to deteriorate further before acting. We urge the Council to immediately mandate the deployment of a Special Political Mission, consistent with the second option recommended by the Secretary-General in his letter dated 1 December. The mission should be complemented by the deployment of an international police force. The presence of such a force could deter further violence, particularly in

Bujumbura. Such a force should be comprised of sufficient numbers of appropriately trained and adequately equipped formed police units along with judicial police and forensic experts who would help investigate killings. We believe that the prompt deployment of such a force could help reduce the level of human rights abuses, and would bolster the peacekeeping mission the African Union has proposed, should it be deployed.

Our organizations also believe that the number of human rights observers in the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the country should be increased and supported to monitor ongoing human rights abuses across the country, including in flashpoint neighborhoods. The OHCHR office should also be directed to publish regular public reports.

Ambassador, the Security Council is empowered to take decisive preventive action to avert further atrocities in Burundi. It needs to act accordingly. In that regard, we encourage the Council to conduct a high-level mission to Burundi in January 2016.

Signed

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
Human Rights Watch
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Copied to
Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission

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