

REPUBLIC OF BURUNDI



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL AND SPOKESPERSON OF THE GOVERNMENT

PRESS BRIEFING OF 12 SEPTEMBER 2017

The month of August 2017 was marked by some activities concerning Burundi on the national and international levels that require the Government to make some comments for the public opinion.

- The statement of the President of the UN Security Council of 2 August 2017,
- The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi of 11 August 2017,
- The 11th East African Military Games and Cultural Event, from 28 August to 5 September 2017,
- The voluntary repatriation of refugees from Tanzania whose first convoy arrived on 7 September 2017.

1. It does not seem appropriate to revert to the statement made by the President of the United Nations Security Council on 2 August 2017, in which the Council expresses a wide range of concerns and recommendations related to the evolution of the political, security and human rights situation in Burundi since the 2015 electoral crisis, especially since a reaction of the Government was made known to the public on 05 August 2017.
2. It is necessary to point out, however, that the Government of Burundi is pleased to note that the United Nations is making significant progress vis-à-vis of its reading of the situation prevailing in Burundi inasmuch as the Security Council "reaffirms its strong commitment to the Sovereignty, Political Independence, Territorial Integrity and Unity of Burundi ". Moreover, the President's Statement "takes note of the generally calm security situation prevailing in the country ", despite the alarming reports produced by certain organizations and press bodies that invest in the manipulation of opinion. On the recommendations made by the Security Council, the Government of Burundi made its comments and justified or explained its position where required.
3. Concerning the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi of 11 August 2017, it should be recalled that it was created irregularly by Resolution 33/24 of the Human Rights Council and adopted by forcing on 30 September 2016, in spite of the total disagreement with the Government of Burundi whose comments and observations had not been taken into consideration before its adoption. A real race against the clock that barely covered a hidden agenda.

The Commission was supposed to carry out an in-depth investigation into the human rights violations and abuses committed in Burundi since April 2015, to determine whether some of them constituted crimes under international law and to identify the alleged perpetrators of these acts. The Government regrets that these thorough investigations never took place, as the Commission produced a tendentious, unbalanced and politically oriented report.

4. In a general and synthetic way, the report accuses Burundian institutions, particularly those that have long been identified as responsible for the failure of all attempts to destabilize security and to change power by force; the executive and the security forces. The report attacks the victims rather than charging the criminals and the putschists whose crimes were committed on the daylight and curiously, none of their crimes is noted by the investigators, denounced and still less condemned by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
5. The Commission itself states that it drafted its report on the basis of Burundian testimonies who sought refuge in Burundi's neighboring countries precisely from those who, following defeat, had withdrawn towards neighboring countries especially in Rwanda, where they receive military training to disrupt security and engage in targeted assassinations of high-ranking officials, facts already known to the Security Council. It further submits that it was not able to conduct further investigations because of the short time it was granted.
6. The Commission nevertheless indicates that it has reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed since April 2015 in Burundi and that without a genuine desire on the part of the Burundian authorities to combat impunity and guarantee independence of the judicial system, the perpetrators of these crimes will go unpunished. It concludes by asking the International Criminal Court to open as soon as possible an investigation over the situation in Burundi since April 2015.
7. The Commission, however, submits that human rights abuses have also been committed by armed opposition groups, but that these have proved difficult to document, whereas the facts and crimes referred to in paragraph 8 were carried out in the daylight in front of local and foreign media cameras and even claimed by their perpetrators.
8. With regard to human rights abuses committed by armed opposition groups or in the context of the insurrection and attempted coup d'état, it is surprising and ridiculous that the Commission should write in the report they were difficult to document while most of them were committed under the cover of cameras of foreign journalists mainly Western who had been invited in advance to attend these desolate shows at specific places to make photos and films, their mission being to display to the whole world a negative image of Burundi that burns. Some even bet on imminent genocide. However, images and films exist.

Here are some examples:

- The attempted lynching by the insurgents on 28 April 2015 in Mutakura, of a man named Olivier NKUNDABASHAKA, who had dual Burundian and French nationality while he was spending holiday within a family in Burundi, labeled as Imbonerakure to justify his lynching. French embassy officials in Bujumbura went to the scene.
- Again in Mutakura, another young man named Gabby SUNGURA was murdered savagely after being mutilated and disemboweled, not to mention mass graves dug by the insurgents to throw their victims there,
- In the neighborhood of Nyakabiga III, 10th Avenue on Thursday, May 07, 2015, a young man named Léonidas MISAGO was burnt alive with a tire (collar torture) by the insurgents for the sole fault of being suspected to be Imbonerakure. He was employed by a mobile phone company.

- A young girl named Jacqueline HAKIZIMANA murdered at Musaga by the insurgents after suffering a gang rape on the night of 02 December 2015,
- Law enforcement officers including police officers disarmed, beaten and seriously injured and made prisoners and others killed by young drug addicts while on duty.
- The grenades fired on May 22, 2015 in the heart of the city center near the former central market against women selling fruit and vegetables, causing at least three deaths and several dozen wounded among them;
- Several rocket attacks on the night of 26 to 27 October 2015 against the convent (Center Jeunes Kamenge), home to the Chair of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR), Monsignor Jean Louis Nahimana and 3 other priests, an attack visibly motivated by the desire to terminate or hinder the work of the TRC.
- Grenade attack aimed against the Minister for Human Rights, Martin Nivyabandi at the place of worship as he went out of mass in Nyakabiga on Sunday, April 26, 2016, leaving one dead and six injured including the Minister's wife.
- The grenades fired on 15 February 2016 in public places in Bujumbura, particularly in the Rohero, Buyenzi and Ngagara areas, causing many deaths and injuries, and other cases which cannot be listed here, which are qualified elsewhere terrorist acts, but which you will not find anywhere in the report established by the Commission: one of the evidence that it was manipulated.

9. It is therefore relevant to ask questions on the basis of this report which contains fallacies and contradictions:

- Why the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has never expressed the least willingness to investigate these cases or to question the absence of a single paragraph condemning the perpetrators of such atrocities in the reports submitted to them when certain cases were even claimed?
- How to make a report and propose actions to be taken when all the data are not available?
- How do you think you have evidence when the witnesses are the actors? Understand here the testimony of those who led the insurgency and who took refuge in the neighboring countries, especially in Rwanda, which has received the mission from the West to destabilize Burundi and in others as the former colonial Belgium and which is the initiator of all the unjust measures taken against Burundi by the international community in general and by the European Union in particular?
- How to understand and trust a report that makes no mention of attacks by armed groups from Rwanda and child soldiers caught on the battlefield and shown to diplomats accredited to Burundi (including those from the European Union), before handing them over to their parents in the presence of UNICEF after their visit to a rehabilitation center? Yet enlisting children in armed groups is a war crime.
- How can we dare to say that there is no will to fight against impunity on the part of the Burundian authorities, while hundreds and hundreds of perpetrators of

abuses, including the elements of the security forces, have been tried and are in prison, and that arrest warrants against the perpetrators of the various crimes, including the perpetrators of the attempted coup d'état not yet apprehended, have been issued even if they are not executed by the host countries?

10. The conclusions of the report calling for an acceleration by the ICC of the opening of investigations in Burundi justifies the Government's apprehensions about the reasons for the hurry and nervousness surrounding the adoption of the Resolution setting up this Commission. The Government had sufficiently explained why it had not wished to collaborate with the Commission, since from the beginning it had stated its intentions by refusing to take into consideration the Government's comments and especially to publish them.
11. The evidence has now been gathered that this Commission was created in reality for the purpose of setting up the International Criminal Court against Burundi, whereas the latter officially signified its withdrawal from this Court because of the politicization observed of the reports on which it is based to look at countries or to ignore others. As the decision is irreversible, this latest attempt to manipulate the international community through a biased report validates further Burundi's position on the withdrawal.
12. In the face of these voluntary omissions, which constitute a serious breach of moral duty in the face of a mission that involves the future of an entire people, the Government of Burundi considers that this report is biased, manipulated, politically oriented and consequently unacceptable. It therefore calls on the UN Security Council to give no credence to its simply political recommendations.
13. For the specific question concerning refugees, the Government welcomed the willingness of the latter to return to their country massively in spite of the UNHCR's reluctance to let them return, with a first convoy arriving from Tanzania on Thursday, 07 September 2017. In this connection, the Government questions the reasons why UNHCR does not allow refugees to return to their homes and, above all, the reasons why UNHCR should publish figures that are beyond comprehension. Either the number is knowingly inflated by UNHCR, or there are people pretending to be Burundian refugees when they are not, so there is an obvious interest that is hidden behind. Burundian refugees have become real hostages, and UNHCR and some host countries are benefiting from them.

Indeed, the figure of more than four hundred thousand (400,000) Burundi refugees advanced by the UNHCR is fanciful when we already know that a considerable number (more than one hundred thousand) have already returned and that we know exactly the population of each province of the country. To reach such a figure, there would be provinces now depopulated and empty of all their populations. It will now be necessary to carry out a joint census and identification of these refugees in order to agree with the figures regularly submitted by UNHCR. An international audit vis-à-vis of the UNHCR on the management of Burundian refugees is essential, especially since the funds to the UNHCR and to the host countries are proportional to the figures presented: one of the reasons that could explain these exaggerated figures.

14. A worth mentioning event before concluding is the holding of the 11th East African Community military games and Cultural Event organized during the week of 28 August to 05 September 2017 at the level of the East African Community (EAC) countries, an opportunity offered to participants to enjoy the charm, calm and peace that currently prevail in Burundi.

15. Finally, the Government would like to reassure the Burundians that it has already identified its enemies and detractors who still have the thirst to surrender our country under their tutelage and the yoke of colonization, and unfortunately they are supported in this by lawless Burundians. Burundi will never surrender its sovereignty and independence against anything. These foreigners and their Burundian accomplices must know this. The Burundian people will fight to their last energy and, like our ancestors, will win this just and noble fight. As a Burundian saying goes, "Ibuye riserutse ntiriba ricishe isuka".

Done at Bujumbura, 12th of September 2017

Philippe NZOBONARIBA

**Secretary-General and Spokesman of the
Government.-**