

HRC38 | Burundi must stop criminalising human rights defenders

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While Burundi still refuses to cooperate with the UN human rights mechanisms, the Commission of Inquiry and the Universal Periodic Review working group both presented their reports during the 38th session of the Human Rights Council.



On 28 June, ISHR delivered a [statement](#) during Burundi's Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This third cycle of the UPR comes as Burundi is experiencing a serious political crisis which has already caused thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 400 000 people.

Burundian civil society actors, and particularly human rights defenders and journalists, have been the primary targets of systematic oppression by the authorities. Germain Rukuki, a human rights defenders working for Association des Juristes Catholiques du Burundi, was recently sentenced to 32 years in prison for, among other things, "breach of State security" and "participation in an insurrectional movement". On 18 June, he was hastily removed from the hospital where he underwent surgery on his leg a few days before, preventing him from receiving appropriate care after such an intervention. We urge Burundian authorities to drop all charges and immediately release Germain Rukuki.

The Commission of Inquiry also highlighted the difficulties faced by independent media to work on and in Burundi, pointing out the "warnings" received by Radio France and two Burundians radios in May 2018.

"We urge the Burundian government to repeal all laws restricting the activities of human rights defenders and to investigate the abuses committed against them. The law should protect and facilitate the vital work of defenders, not criminalise it," added ISHR's Salma El Hosseiny in her statement at the Human Rights Council during Burundi's UPR review.

The Commission continues to regret the refusal of Burundi to fully cooperate with its mechanism and noted that Burundi recently upheld its position by rejecting recommendations regarding the Commission of Inquiry during its UPR review last January.

Finally, ISHR urges Burundi to review its position and start cooperating with all UN mechanisms including the Commission of Inquiry.

Watch the statement here:

Contact: Adélaïde ETONG KAME, a.etong@ishr.ch

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