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BURUNDI: HUMAN RIGHTS – [redacted]

Summary

Burundi presents a bleak human rights picture. We have credible reports of arbitrary detention, including of children as young as 10, torture and targeted killings. [redacted]. The Burundian Government is closing down options for a political settlement and taking a belligerent tone with the international community.

Detail

1. International concern about human rights abuses in Burundi has grown steadily since popular demonstrations against a third term for President Nkurunziza started in April 2015. Concerns broadly fall into six categories: disappearances, torture, targeted killings, closing down of political space, limiting freedom of expression and the treatment of children.
2. In April, street demonstrations against Nkurunziza's controversial bid for a third term pushed Burundi into the international headlines. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said that the Burundian police used excessive lethal force against demonstrators. Although the demonstrations have now ended, those who were involved continue to be at risk. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Burundi has documented 134 deaths and "more than 90 cases of torture" since April, in addition to more than 700 arbitrary arrests since September. They cite, with particular concern, the case of 52 children detained alongside adults.
3. The OHCHR say that the Police and Intelligence services use torture to force confessions relating to intention to participate in armed rebellion. Amnesty published a report entitled "Just tell me what to confess to" which also documents torture. The Guardian and BBC both picked up the story in graphic detail.
4. Activists are also deeply concerned about the treatment of those allegedly involved in planning the attempted military coup on 13 May. The most senior officer to have been arrested, General Cyrille Ndayirukiye (comment: a former Burundian Defence Minister), is detained at Gitega prison. A list of detainees is available online. We have seen regular allegations of mistreatment and poor conditions at Gitega in general and for the alleged coup plotters in particular. Others are probably held in secret detention centres where conditions are likely to be significantly worse.
5. The Burundian Government's reaction has been to deny any wrongdoing by the security services and to claim that if evidence of wrongdoing is presented, the individual in question would be prosecuted. [redacted]
6. [redacted] said that she was aware of the children in detention, confirmed that the youngest was 10 years old and said that the government was taking steps to arrange for them to be released. She declined to give a timeframe and said that their release would depend on the international community's willingness to finance "re-education" camps to facilitate their re-integration into society.

7. [redacted] on 8 Oct at their offices. The [redacted] noted that around 70 children that originally been detained, so characterised the fact that only 50 were still in detention as a positive development. She was surprisingly frank about cases of torture and poor conditions of detention. She said that the [redacted] conducted regular visits to places of detention and raised concerns with the [redacted]. She thought that some detainees had been released as a result of the [redacted]s interventions. However, she also thought that at least some of the detentions were justifiable on the basis that the authorities were worried about the risk of youth leaving Burundi to participate in armed rebellions.