

**FCO FOI REFERENCE: 0603-17 –  
DIGEST OF INFORMATION TO BE RELEASED**

**January to December 2015**

**Diptel: BURUNDI: GOVERNMENT IN DENIAL/VISIT OF HEAD OF AD-CS  
Date: 18/04/2015**

*Summary*

*Pre-election violence seems to have begun in rural Burundi. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights says that Burundi has "pierced the outer edges of an acute crisis, and will enter the inner circles soon, unless there is a course correction". Burundian reaction suggests that we are having little impact so far: [redacted] even as 6,000 Burundians flee to Rwanda in two weeks complaining of violence and intimidation.*

- 1. The refugee flow across the border and credible allegations that weapons were being distributed to the ruling party's youth militia, the Imbonerakure, were worrying signs. We did not want to see security forces attacking demonstrators. They worried that the publication of election results colline by colline would allow villages who had voted against a third term to be singled out for reprisals.*
- 2. Dholakia met opposition politicians, who complained of government intimidation and warned of likely violence when and if Nkurunziza announced his candidacy, stressing that it would not come from them. They were divided about when best to protest, to avoid giving the government the excuse for a crackdown.*

**COMMENT**

*[redacted]: the mounting evidence of the Imbonekure's actions, and state distribution of weapons and the planning of lists, the number of heavily armed police on the streets, the [redacted], and the undeniable scale of refugees crossing the border make their responses look absurd. However, they will continue to do what they can get away with, pushing slowly towards the President standing again.*

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**Email from Central Africa Team, title: Burundi Update 27 April  
Date: 27/04/2015**

*Situation on the ground*

- 1. While quiet over night, the situation deteriorated today. The military has been deployed, and is thought to be constraining police action in some places although the police are reported to have thrown grenades, used live rounds and tear gas. The police are arresting prominent human rights defenders and civil society. The police and government Ministers entered private radio stations closing down their lives broadcasts, so the population can only now get information on what is happening from the state broadcaster. Our primary focus is on trying to verify the various concerning reports, especially of attacks with machetes by political youth groups in some areas against those they deem to be organising the protests.*

**Diptel: BURUNDI: PROTESTS ERUPT AS NKURUNZIZA NOMINATED**  
**Date: 30/04/2015**

*Summary*

*Protests erupt on the streets of Bujumbura as President Nkurunziza is nominated by his party to stand for a 3rd term in upcoming presidential elections. Police and military now have the situation under control, following violent clashes on Sunday and at the start of the week. Government crackdown on freedom of expression continues.*

*Events on the ground*

- 1. The demonstrations started on Sunday 26 April, with hundreds of protesters throwing stones at police, who responded with tear gas, water cannons and live bullets. The scale of protests increased on Monday, and the army were deployed – reportedly to calm the situation as the police were considered to have overreacted. At least two demonstrators are known to have been killed, with around fifty injured on both sides, and hundreds arrested. The Burundian Government has launched an enquiry, though it is unclear whether it is mandated to examine the circumstances of the deaths or simply the question of whether the demonstrations were legal.*
- 2. The Chief of Defence Staff and the Director General of Police yesterday made a joint statement calling for peace. Demonstrators are still on the streets, but the police have successfully contained them in the outlying areas of Bujumbura. The centre of town, where our office is located, remains calm.*
- 3. Freedom of expression is under threat. The government have prevented private radio stations from broadcasting live outside of the capital, and some have been taken off air completely. Social media networks have been intermittently blocked, and human rights defenders have been arrested – although Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, the most high profile, has since been released.*
- 4. Intimidation and fear of violence continues to drive a refugee exodus. Burundian refugees in Rwanda now exceed 25,000, with at least 3,000 still arriving each day. Several thousand have also fled to DRC. [Redacted]*

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**Email from High Commissioner [Will Gelling] in Kigali**

**Date: 06/05/2015**

**Title: Burundi Visit - Day One**

*In general terms, police are everywhere, but do not look tense or under pressure. We have seen one mass arrest of about thirty young men surrounded by armed police. There are pick-up trucks loaded with police with tear-gas devices shouting and singing and we've seen one group of perhaps thirty people whom [redacted] are Imbonekure in the centre of town running down a street, armed with sticks and some with rifles. However the overall atmosphere does not feel that tense. People are still going to work, though most shops are shut and the hotel at which I am staying has been unable to buy food. [redacted] The army seems mostly to be trusted, in particular in quarters where police and residents have clashed, and are allowed free passage through residents' roadblocks. There are still 200 or so students camped outside the US Embassy, asking for guarantees for their safety. The Immigration Directorate has a huge queue, most likely from Burundians seeking passports to leave. There were only seven people on the flight from Kigali.*

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**Email from High Commission in Kigali**

**Date: 06/05/2015**

**Title: Burundi Visit - Day Two**

*I did a roundtable with all the main private media outlets. All complained that their antennae outside Bujumbura had been disconnected. Their personal and business phone lines had been cut, which made dial-in programmes impossible, and prevented them from broadcasting live from demonstrations. Advertisers were not paying their bills. The Minister of Communication had met several of the stations earlier in the week and said that they could restart broadcasts providing that they did not do live outside broadcasts, did not mention deaths amongst protestors and agreed to work with the government "for the public good". They had refused, but were fast running out of money and could not survive for more than a few weeks. APR has been completely shut down, with its director now in hiding following death threats from the intelligence service.*

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**Diptel: BURUNDI AFTER THE FAILED COUP: NOT A HOPEFUL OUTLOOK**

**Date: 21/05/2015**

*Summary*

*Calm, free, or fair elections looking impossible. Nkurunziza back in control [redacted]: security force and youth group abuses more likely. Protestors coming back on the streets in Bujumbura, but the flight of many opposition leaders and government controls on their movement and communication make organised opposition difficult. Burundi's constitution and the Arusha deal being undermined, but a significant risk of civil strife remains.*

- 1. The brief attempted coup of 13-14 May has had a significant, mostly negative, effect on Burundi's security, politics and economics. Political compromise is less likely with the reinforcement of the President's position and the flight of many opposition leaders and supporters from the country in the aftermath of the coup. Those who remain have gone into hiding or had their mobile phones cut, making co-ordination and campaigning difficult. Police checkpoints limit their movement, making the mobilisation of support difficult.*
- 2. Most social media remain blocked. Many civil society leaders and journalists are in hiding. Only the pro-government national radio station is on air. Other local media houses have been attacked or had their transmitters disabled. The National Communication Council has summoned foreign press to "remind" them that their role is to report on elections not demonstrations.*
- 3. Anti third term demonstrators are coming back on the streets in outlying neighbourhoods of Bujumbura. The government has labelled them 'collaborators' in the attempted coup and has tried to disperse them, including through violence by the Imbonekure, the ruling party's armed youth wing. Six months ago Human Rights Watch alleged that police and soldiers carried out at least 47 extrajudicial executions in Northern Burundi.*

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**BURUNDI: LITTLE OPTIMISM IN BUJUMBURA**

**Date: 12/06/2015**

*Summary*

*Following the attempted coup a month ago, Burundians who remain in Bujumbura have resumed their daily lives in a climate of fear, uncertainty and increasing economic difficulty, watched closely by the police.*

1. *We saw at first hand the police using live rounds against demonstrators, with one student confirmed dead. At night people stay home or patrol their neighbourhoods, for fear of the intelligence services and youth militia (imbonerakure). The UN (MENUB) say they have visited some political prisoners and are assisting with access to lawyers, but there are almost certainly others in secret detention. With private radios still not broadcasting, access to information and freedom of expression remains severely limited.*

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**Diptel: BURUNDI: PRESIDENT'S RIGHT HAND MAN ASSASSINATED**

**Date: 04/08/2015**

*Summary*

*The following day Burundi's leading civil rights leader is shot and wounded.*

4. *On the evening of 3 August, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, Burundi's leading human rights activist and an outspoken critic of Nkurunziza's third term was shot in Bujumbura. He is now in intensive care.*
5. *[redacted] house to house searches being conducted by police following the attack. We cannot rule out the risk of reprisals by members of the Imbonerakure to avenge their leader. The fact that it happened in Kamenge will make it difficult to spin as ethnically motivated.*
6. *It is unclear who carried out the attack against Pierre Claver Mbonimpa. The attack will persuade those civil society groups not yet cowed by the government's approach to the elections to keep their heads well down.*

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**Diptel: BURUNDI: PRESIDENT SWORN IN. NEXT STEPS FOR OUR POLICY.**

**Date: 25/08/2015**

*Summary*

*Government threatens tighter controls against civil society. Private Media still off air. Security situation calmer, but a campaign of targeted killings is underway. Unclear whether opposition will take up arms.*

4. *There are legal plans afoot to limit even further the role of NGOs, and the government is considering a change to the constitution to unpick the ethnic and power balances enshrined in the Arusha Accords. Burundi has rejected the UNSG's choice of envoy, and is firm that all UN political personnel should leave by the end of October. Private radio stations are still not permitted to broadcast.*

5. The centre of Bujumbura feels less tense. Night-time shooting in certain suburbs has become frequent, however, and troops and police are omnipresent. Occasional grenade attacks happen unpredictably. The murder of General Adolphe, the man who saw down the attempted coup and delivered the election for Nkurunziza has been shocking for the establishment. Two senior ruling party members opposed to the third term have been murdered as has a former Army Chief of Staff. [redacted] since violence is more specifically targeted, [redacted]

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## **BURUNDI: ARE WE APPROACHING A CRITICAL MOMENT?**

**Date: 06/11/2015**

### *Summary*

*Burundi may be reaching an important moment in its slow deterioration. The number of deaths is rising; the President has announced that the police can use "all means" after 8 November; command and control is weakening; the ruling party is adopting more and more extreme positions; and Nkurunziza and those around him seem totally dug in.*

1. *Sporadic, targeted killings of anti-third term campaigners in Bujumbura are morphing into a relentless back and forth of violence, albeit with numbers of deaths still small. Every morning bodies are discovered on the street or in shallow graves, particularly in Tutsi areas. Responsibility lies with the police, who make no effort to disguise their actions, the Imbonekure youth militia and the Service National de Renseignements (SNR). Growing numbers of people are being detained openly by the SNR and being held incommunicado. Those released tell of torture. Equally, small numbers of policemen are being murdered every few days by opponents. In daylight hours, in the centre of town, life goes on, but the atmosphere is quiet and fearful. It is difficult to get a clear picture of what is happening out of Bujumbura, but reports of small but fatal clashes between the police and opponents of the regime are growing.*
  - b) *Command and control is weakening. The Imbonekure, Police and SNR are operating with significant autonomy and impunity and settling old scores. We are probably now approaching the point where it is no longer possible to rein them in by political direction alone, [redacted].*

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## **Email from BE Kigali visiting Burundi – Title: fortnightly political update covering 9 - 22 November**

**Date: 23/11/2015**

1. *Police sweeps in anti-third term areas continue and are accompanied by arbitrary arrest. A video published on YouTube allegedly shows the arrest of around 100 opposition supporters in Musaga on 16 Nov.*
4. *However, we also have reporting of some local leaders dispensing brutal summary justice and arbitrary arrests and disappearances at the hands of the imbonerakure. Prison conditions, which were poor before the crisis, have been made worse by overcrowding following the detention of political opponents or those trying to flee to Rwanda.*
5. *Human rights defenders in the provinces say that their relationships with police, intelligence and local government officials have deteriorated. Police and intelligence chiefs*

at provincial level were replaced after Nkurunziza was sworn in and they reportedly have instructions to be tougher than their predecessors.

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**Email from FCO Great Lakes Special Envoy**

**Date: 14/12/2015**

**Title: SENIOR READERS' UPDATE: BURUNDI DETERIORATION OFFICIAL\_SENSITIVE**

Dear all,

**SENIOR READERS' UPDATE: BURUNDI DETERIORATION**

*Although the situation in Burundi has been fragile since the President announced his third term bid in April, with regular night-time killings of opponents, the situation took a turn for the worse over the weekend. Fighting broke out in three military bases at 3am on Friday morning, likely a result of incursion by armed insurgents opposed to the regime. Although the bases were secured by mid-afternoon on Friday, the police subsequently killed a number of people, including through summary executions. The Army has announced 87 deaths. Non-governmental figures assess the figure to be much higher. 28 bodies were found on the streets of Bujumbura, including a 14 year old child. Emotions are running high. We continue to judge that the conflict is more politically-based than ethnic, so although we cannot preclude the possibility of genocide in the future, we judge it more likely that we will see continuing violence, with occasional upsurges, including attacks against government institutions, possibly leading to civil war. The economy is failing.*

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**Diptel: MR DUDDRIDGE'S VISIT TO BURUNDI: SCENESETTER**

**Date: 15/12/2015**

*Summary*

*There are terrible human rights abuses under way in Bujumbura, and refugees continue to leave. This is the time for very frank conversations.*

- 1. Since the violence began, 300-400 demonstrators have been killed, along with perhaps 200 policemen. The police and SNR intelligence service are behaving brutally in Bujumbura, with arbitrary detentions, execution-style killings, and indiscriminate raids. Certain neighbourhoods see nightly shooting and violence, and self-protection residents' groups have been formed which patrol the streets after dark. The military has, since the coup attempt, stayed above the fray for the most part.*
- 2. A campaign of targeted assassinations is under way to remove members of the ruling party who did not support the President's third term, human rights activists and opposition leaders. Almost all opposition leaders have fled to Belgium or Rwanda. The ruling party is becoming increasingly extreme in its statements, which are vitriolically anti-opposition and anti-Belgian. The government continues to sponsor the armed Imbonerakure youth groups that helped it deliver the President's re-election. The opposition that remains in country is becoming slowly more radicalised and is likely to have carried out a major attack on 10/11 December against army*

*bases in the capital. He has shown no desire to change course, however, or engage in a dialogue with opponents. Without this, the violence will continue.*

- 3. Facts are hard to come by since private media have been closed down by the government and NGOs and other independent organisations have had their accounts frozen or their legal status rescinded.*

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## **OFFICIAL SENSITIVE BURUNDI: MINISTER FOR AFRICA VISITS KIGALI AND BUJUMBURA**

**Date: 18/12/2015**

### *Summary*

*James Duddridge visits Rwanda and Burundi on his regional trip to address the Burundi crisis. Hears harrowing accounts of abuses in Bujumbura.*

- 1. In his meetings with civil society, UN agencies, human rights organisations, opposition politicians and anti-Nkurunziza members of the ruling party, Mr Duddridge heard a litany of abuses, mostly in Bujumbura, including disappearances, extrajudicial killings by the police following indiscriminate raids at night, mass graves, torture in custody, the use of military and police uniforms by armed youth groups, the intelligence agency acting with impunity, a complete absence of independent media and the collapse of the NGO sector.*
- 3. Torture, killing and arbitrary arrests were not the appropriate response, nor would they work*

## **January to December 2016**

### **Diptel from HC Kigali: BURUNDI: UNSC VISIT TO BUJUMBURA SCENESETTER**

**Date: 18/01/2016**

### *Summary*

*They will find continuing violence, with probably 800 people dead in the last few months. Police and intelligence service brutality continues. There is no longer any private media. Most NGOs have had their accounts frozen. The government is utterly intransigent.*

- 1. Police violently suppressed the anti-third term campaign. Images of water cannon being deployed and burning tyre barricades put Burundi on the front pages.*
- 2. the government turned up the pressure on media and civil society. Using the spurious allegation that they were co-plotters, arrest warrants were issued for virtually every political opposition leader and independent media outlets were shut down and in some cases burnt down. Civil society organisations had their accounts frozen. Human rights defenders were attacked.*
- 3. A pattern of violence emerged. Police, allegedly working with imbonerakure (the ruling party's violent youth wing), and the intelligence agency, carry out nightly house to house searches in opposition stronghold neighbourhoods. These are often violent (an entire family of 4, including two children, was shot dead on 16 Oct) and lead to arbitrary arrest, disappearance, torture and increasing sexual violence. Small numbers of bodies are found on the streets each morning with their hands bound.*

Local NGOs and the OHCHR report the existence of at least nine mass graves. Our best guess is that 600-800 people have been killed since April, including a few hundred police officers,

4. On 15 January, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that “deeply worrying new trends are emerging in Burundi, including cases of sexual violence by security forces and a sharp increase in enforced disappearances and torture cases”. His statement included accounts of gang rape during police search operations.

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#### Email from HC Kigali: Burundi - July update

Date: 04/08/2016

1. The more general pattern of lower level attacks, **arbitrary arrests and intimidation** continued, with fewer overt attacks and the resulting gruesome images, pushing the problem further from the media spotlight. Reports suggest over 25 deaths and 300 arbitrary arrests country-wide during July. On 22 July, Jean Bigirimana, a journalist from the IWACU media group, was kidnapped, allegedly by the security services, in central Burundi. The police denied his existence in detention, [redacted -.]
2. Burundi again employed the no-show tactic in **Geneva during the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT)** special review of Burundi on 28-29 July to review allegations of torture and other abuses in the country. The review was an exceptional process, only the 3<sup>rd</sup> such procedure in 30 years. The Burundian Justice Minister Kanyana, initially presented the government report, which left a raft of questions from the Committee. The Burundian delegation then simply failed to turn up to address them, claiming new topics had been raised and demanding more time to prepare a response.
3. **Human Rights Watch** published two reports, one on torture of suspected government opponents by the Burundian intelligence services and police and another on rape by members of the youth league of the ruling party. The concerns documented were closed related to the CAT's review.

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#### Email from HC Kigali: Burundi - August update / September forward look

Date: 07/09/2016

##### Security and human rights

1. The pattern of **arbitrary arrests and intimidation continued**, with further disappearances targeting opposition sympathisers, Tutsi members of the ex-military, and remaining media. Jean Bigirimana, the kidnapped Iwacu journalist remains missing after 6 weeks, though one Rwandan/Burundi journalist was released.
2. Four lawyers who contributed to an alternative report by a coalition of Burundian NGOs for the July UN Committee Against Torture's review of Burundi were requested to be struck off the Bujumbura Bar Council, facing allegations that they had committed several offences, including involvement in an insurrectionist movement and an attempted coup. Reprisals for independent stances were not limited to civil society - the police spokesperson announced that the police would



start hunting people who spread rumours on social networks. **More positively**, the remaining nine students held on charges of contempt of the head of state for defacing pictures of the President were released, and the Oximity news correspondent who allegedly vanished in June was seen back in Bujumbura.

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**Email from HC Kigali- Title: Burundi - September update / October forward look  
Date: 04/10/2016**

### *Summary*

*Some concerns that a violent solution/outcome is being seen as a viable option by some of those opposed to regime*

### *Security and human rights*

- 1. Harassment of opposition still inside Burundi continued, with the arrest of small opposition party FEDES-SANGIRA President Gervais Niyongabo on 28 September on the orders of the Bujumbura Appeal Court. Ironically, he was arrested while leading a training session on behalf of the Ministry of Good Governance.*
- 2. Wider trends reported by civil society partners included no respite in arbitrary killings and continued persecution targeting non-commissioned Tutsi members of the National Army, with six arrests, two abductions and one suspicious suicide while in police custody. Harassment and arrests of MSD and FNL opposition members also continued*

### *Economic*

- 6. September saw a new ruling party programme aimed at raising funds dedicated to support the party's activities and events. Members and non-members of the CNDD-FDD were all obligated to contribute. Many were harassed and intimidated. In some parts of the country, the CNDD-FDD youth wing set up check points to checking that each person passing through had paid or contributed.*

**Email from HC Kigali- Title: Burundi - November update / December forward look  
Date: 08/12/2016**

### *Political and human rights*

- 1. The **politicisation of ethnicity** and risk of ethnic violence or even genocide became a macabre battleground in November, following a joint report by an INGO and local NGO documenting "Repression and genocidal dynamics in Burund" and campaign targeting the UN and AU to take concrete action. Their #StopThisMovie campaign, based on an imaginary film about genocide in Burundi was met with the Burundian regime's own #thisisourgenocide equally grim counter campaign.*

### **January to June 2017**

**Email from HC Kigali: Burundi - December update / January forward look  
Date: 05/01/2017**

Political and human rights

1. The **human rights situation remained bleak**. December saw the number of detainees top 10,000, the majority accused rather than convicted. A number of reported deaths, disappearances and numerous arbitrary arrests continued, including a trade union leader and opposition (FNL) activists.
2. Earlier this week, Burundi **banned League Iteka, the country's oldest rights organization**, amid a crackdown on critical voices. A law was passed cracking down on foreign NGOs, forcing them to keep foreign currency with the central bank and deposit a third of their annual budget before being allowed to operate, and stipulating that local recruitment must respect the ethnic balances in the Constitution. An additional law on Burundian non-profit organisations asks them to provide new information on sources of foreign financing. These decisions followed a more positive move to lift a ban imposed in November on 11 NGOs suspended for their alleged involvement in the political crisis.

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**Diptel from HC Kigali: Title: BURUNDI: VISIT OF BARONESS ANELAY “GLIMMERS IN THE DARKNESS”**

**Date: 22/02/2017**

Summary

*The Minister sees many challenges - including minimal democratic space, isolationist government policy, and gender-based violence*

Human Rights

5. *Burundians in exile described continuing political persecution and restrictions on civil society. OHCHR painted a worrying picture of a government who only knew how to conduct politics via violence, especially through the youth wing of the party (the Imbonerakure). There was concern about the potential for a descent into conflict.*
6. *Baroness Anelay also heard about the government’s suspension of cooperation with OHCHR, and prevention of a full deployment of AU human rights observers or any UN police, leaving a worrying lack of international monitors on the ground.*

COMMENT

*It was made clear to the Minister that if fundamental human rights and governance problems are not addressed, Burundi will not escape the repetitive cycles of authoritarianism and violence that have plagued the country for decades.*

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**Email from HC Kigali, title : Burundi - March update, April forward look**

**Date: 06/04/2017**

Summary

*Bujumbura remains quiet, though steady trickle of killings, and fleeing refugees, continue*

Political and human rights

1. Security in Bujumbura remains generally good, with a sense of more normalised life returning – e.g. more people are now venturing out at night. However arbitrary arrests and detention continued, and around 7 bodies a week appeared, mainly in the provinces. Arrests of FNL supporters seems to be a growing trend.
2. March saw a crackdown on University of Burundi students in response to their protests against a Presidential decree reforming the scholarship system. Dozens of students were detained, with some now missing.

Comment

A quiet month, with a continued pattern of slow but steady oppression by the regime, with sporadic resistance from some corners - students, armed opposition, and human rights defenders

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**Email from HC Kigali, title : Burundi - April/May update, June/July forward look  
Date: 07/06/2017**

*The veneer of calm remains, though not too far from the surface lies the ongoing pattern of intimidation, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and targeted killings (3-4 a week are our best estimates over the period), including a focus on FNL and MSD party supporters. Some Generals, imprisoned after the 2015 attempted coup, are reportedly no longer allowed visits or food brought by their families.*