



General Assembly

Distr.: General
23 July 2024
English
Original: French

Human Rights Council

Fifty-seventh session

9 September–9 October 2024

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Situation of human rights in Burundi

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo

Summary

The Human Rights Council, in paragraph 9 of its resolution 54/20 on the situation of human rights in Burundi, adopted on 12 October 2023, requested the Special Rapporteur to present to the Council, at its fifty-sixth session, an oral update on the situation of human rights in Burundi and to submit to the Council, at its fifty-seventh session, and to the General Assembly, at its seventy-ninth session, a comprehensive report.



I. Introduction

A. Context

1. Over the past 12 months, Burundi has seen high internal tensions, which have resulted in a narrowing of civic space and repression of political opponents, media professionals and human rights defenders. The widespread impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of human rights violations committed in the context of the various crises the country has endured, particularly in 2015, the deteriorating security situation, especially since the resumption of attacks by the rebel group Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi (RED Tabara), and the increase in the number of cases of enforced disappearance and arbitrary arrest remain issues of concern for the Special Rapporteur. The situation is exacerbated by an unprecedented economic crisis amid a volatile economy characterized by double-digit inflation (26.3 per cent), scarce foreign currency, sharp depreciation of the local currency and a high tax burden, all of which considerably limit household purchasing power. The poverty rate exceeds 50 per cent, while the Gini coefficient is 37 per cent.¹

2. The population is facing a number of difficulties, including shortages of fuel, water and other commodities and recurring electricity outages. The unfinished national reconciliation process, the climate-related humanitarian crisis and limited institutional capacity to address and resolve the external and internal causes of the crisis have exacerbated vulnerabilities and reduced prospects for the situation to improve. The Special Rapporteur is particularly concerned by a series of events that, in combination, could be warning signs of serious violations of international law and international human rights law during the legislative and municipal elections due to take place in 2025. To ensure that prevention, mediation and security mechanisms are put in place to curb the emergence of new tensions, this report assesses the factors that might hinder the holding of free, transparent and credible elections, as well as the risks to peace and security in Burundi. It is intended as an early warning for the Burundian authorities and the diplomatic community.

B. Engagement with the Special Rapporteur and international human rights mechanisms

1. Cooperation with the Special Rapporteur

3. Burundi has not been cooperating with the Special Rapporteur. In fact, its hostility was evident at a meeting of the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (Third Committee) in New York on 25 October 2023 when Mr. Zéphyrin Maniratanga, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations, in reference to the Special Rapporteur's 2023 report,² stated that the drafter of this political document should bear in mind that the lies, slander and false accusations it contains are an attack on the reputation and dignity of the Burundian people and will not go unpunished forever.

4. In the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, which began in May 2024, Burundi took note of the various recommendations encouraging it to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and to grant him full, unimpeded access to the country.

5. On 28 March 2024, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation, Mr. Albert Shingiro, called on the European Union not to renew the Special Rapporteur's mandate in September 2024. According to the Minister, Burundi is fulfilling its human rights obligations and has set up national mechanisms for the protection of these rights. He noted that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur was established without the country's involvement to exert political pressure on the Government of Burundi. In Mr. Shingiro's opinion, keeping the mandate, which has no value added for the promotion of human rights,

¹ See https://www.unicef.org/burundi/media/4591/file/FRA_National%20Budget%20Brief%202023-24.pdf.

² A/HRC/54/56.

creates useless and preventable tensions at a time when relations between the international community and Burundi “are heating up”.³

6. From 11 to 21 March 2024, the Special Rapporteur undertook a country visit to Rwanda. The Special Rapporteur wishes to thank Rwanda for authorizing access to its territory and extending its hospitality to him. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur met with the Rwandan authorities and representatives of the African Union and the European Union accredited in Rwanda, visited the refugee camp in Mahama and travelled to Huye. The Special Rapporteur also met with Burundian nationals, refugees and government actors living in Rwanda.

2. Engagement with other international human rights mechanisms and entities

7. On 10 October 2023, Burundi was elected member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2024–2026. The Special Rapporteur stresses that seats on the Council are attributed on a regional basis to ensure geographic representation. Membership in the Council comes with a responsibility to respect the highest human rights standards, at both the diplomatic and national levels. On 6 June 2024, the General Assembly elected five non-permanent members of the Security Council and established the Bureau for its seventy-ninth session. Mr. Maniratanga will chair the Third Committee at that session.

8. Discussions as part of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review of Burundi were held in a constructive spirit on 4 May 2023. The Human Rights Council adopted the report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review⁴ at its fifty-fourth session, and Burundi took note, among others, of the following recommendations:

- Ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;
- Strengthen the Penal Code provisions against torture and ill-treatment, in accordance with its international commitments;
- Disarm and demobilize the Imbonerakure, and take concrete steps to reform the police and security forces, as well as the National Intelligence Service;
- Conduct a comprehensive investigation into allegations of arbitrary arrests, torture and unlawful detention by law enforcement and other national security structures;
- Fully guarantee the unduly restricted freedoms of expression, the press, association and peaceful assembly by allowing all media, without exception, to operate freely, lifting the prohibitions on various human rights organizations and facilitating their return to the country;
- Adopt effective measures to guarantee the implementation of the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly.⁵

9. In the light of the history of Burundi and the current context in the country, the Special Rapporteur is of the view that to merely take note of the recommendations demonstrates not only a lack of political will to ensure a return to the rule of law and broaden the civic space, but also clear tolerance for the impunity that has been criticized in the country since 2015.

10. While Burundi took note of the recommendation to re-establish cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Special Rapporteur is of the view that reopening the OHCHR country office is a noteworthy pledge by the Burundian authorities to protect human rights. He welcomes the mission to Burundi carried out by the OHCHR Regional Representative for Central Africa from 6 to 10 May 2024.

11. In the period covered by this report, no special procedures mandate holders visited the country. The Special Rapporteur recalls that Burundi issued a standing invitation to special

³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64HDh6cLjtE>.

⁴ A/HRC/54/11.

⁵ A/HRC/54/11/Add.1, para. 7.

procedures on 13 June 2013 and encourages it to renew and strengthen its collaboration with all international human rights protection mechanisms.

C. Risk analysis regarding the 2025 legislative and municipal elections

12. With reference to the country's history, the reports of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi,⁶ the increasingly concerning socioeconomic situation and common risk factors identified through the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes,⁷ the Special Rapporteur wishes to draw attention to risk factors that, during the 2025 legislative and municipal elections, might be both objective signs of a deterioration in the human rights situation and the consequences of such a deterioration.

1. Impunity and its impact on the persistence of human rights violations

13. Paragraph 22 of the Framework for Analysis states that this risk factor is also relevant where the legacies of past atrocity crimes have not been adequately addressed through individual criminal accountability, reparation, truth-seeking and reconciliation processes, as well as comprehensive reform measures in the security and judicial sectors. The Special Rapporteur underscored in his previous report that impunity is caused and sustained by the judicial system in Burundi.⁸ Persistent inaction, tolerance of violations and the refusal to use available means are noteworthy. To date, no authorities close to the regime implicated in serious human rights violations committed since 2015 have been held to account for their acts. The State continues to exercise systematic control over the National Intelligence Service and the Imbonerakure militia, which assists or supplements the security forces or replaces them in localities where they are not present. The Imbonerakure have free rein to torture and intimidate the population (especially dissident voices, members of opposition parties, members of civil society organizations and media professionals). They regularly undergo paramilitary training,⁹ are considered heroes at the highest levels of the State¹⁰ and enjoy the support of the authorities. The militarization of the Imbonerakure demonstrates that preparation is being stepped up, through mass training exercises in various localities around the country, including with songs and slogans designed to intimidate opponents, with a view to engaging in acts of intimidation during the electoral period.

14. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that the lack of judicial independence has worsened since the political crisis of 2015. Complaints of serious violations have rarely led to impartial investigations, and even more rarely to the prosecution and conviction of the perpetrators. The common country assessment conducted in 2022¹¹ and the Special Rapporteur's previous reports¹² remain relevant with regard to the judicial system. It is important to recall that the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi, signed in 2000, identified the lack of a separation of powers and judicial independence as one of the sources of conflict in the country. For access to justice to be realized and for the judiciary to play its role to the full, it is necessary to overhaul the legal framework and ensure that it is effective and supported by genuine political will.

2. Corruption and its impact on economic and social life

15. Corruption remains endemic in the country, and few officials who have used public funds for personal ends have had to account for their actions. Corruption appears to have seeped into the highest levels of the State and is visible in the public administration (the justice system and public procurement in the areas of infrastructure construction and natural

⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/hr-bodies/hrc/co-i-burundi/co-i-burundi>, in particular the 2020 and 2021 reports.

⁷ A/70/741-S/2016/71, annex.

⁸ A/HRC/54/56, para. 32.

⁹ See <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/2024/01/19/cibitoke-des-entrainements-paramilitaires-des-imbonerakure-effraient-les-habitants/>.

¹⁰ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgxBcuSIJos>.

¹¹ United Nations, Burundi: Common Country Assessment 2022.

¹² A/HRC/51/44 and A/HRC/54/56.

resource exploitation, particularly in the negotiation of mining permits). This widespread corruption has the effect of weakening the rule of law and depriving the Burundian population of important resources needed for its development. In January 2023, before the members of his party – the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy) (CNDD-FDD) – President Ndayishimiye asked all those who had misappropriated funds to return the funds discreetly by depositing them in the account of the Treasury. To the Special Rapporteur, this statement sounds like an admission that anti-corruption efforts have failed.¹³

3. Restrictions on civic space

16. The civic space is characterized by, inter alia, a de facto CNDD-FDD monopoly on the conduct of public affairs, surveillance of all sectors of political and administrative life, undue interference with the functioning of the main opposition party, forced recruitment into CNDD-FDD, threats and repression against political opponents and arbitrary arrest and detention of journalists and human rights defenders. The Special Rapporteur also noted attempts to control the narrative of articles published in the media¹⁴ and the instrumentalization of the law for political ends, in particular to obtain harsher court decisions in cases involving journalists.

17. The lack of reforms, in such areas as non-profit organizations and freedom of assembly, and the inability of the National Independent Human Rights Commission to remind the Government and various stakeholders of the country's international commitments (with regard to, for instance, freedom of assembly, the expression of dissident voices, conditions of arrest and detention, the impartiality of the courts, the principle that no one is above the law and the consistency of State actions) are issues of major concern for the Special Rapporteur.

4. A volatile security situation

18. On 23 December 2023, armed men reportedly killed at least 20 people and injured another nine near the border of Burundi with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in an attack for which the rebel group RED Tabara, based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, claimed responsibility. According to government sources, 12 children, 2 pregnant women and 1 police officer were killed in the attack. Other attacks attributed by the Government to the same group have been recorded, including grenade attacks in public places, restaurants and bars. Armed men belonging to RED Tabara reportedly killed nine people and injured several others in a nighttime attack in western Burundi, near the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on 26 February 2024.

19. The resurgence of attacks has compelled the Government to take bold action, close cinemas and ban drinking in bars. There have also been attacks on public infrastructure, including an attack against electrical transformers on 24 April 2024 whose alleged perpetrator was arrested carrying dynamite.

20. An attack took place in Kamenge on 5 May 2024 in which six people were injured, one of whom later succumbed to their injuries. An unexploded grenade and four explosives were found at the scene. On 10 May 2024, another attack was committed at the Kamenge bus depot, killing six people and injuring dozens of others. On the same day, a grenade attack in the Ngagara neighbourhood of Bujumbura injured 38 people, including five seriously, who were all taken to health-care centres. The attacker, who was wounded, was arrested. On 11 May 2024, the spokesperson for the Ministry of the Interior, Community Development and Public Security named the alleged perpetrators of the attacks being carried out in Bujumbura since 25 April 2024. According to the authorities, these individuals are members of a foreign-backed network whose aim is to destabilize the country.

¹³ See <https://abpinfo.bi/2023/01/25/le-president-la-republique-appelle-les-leaders-a-retourner-secretement-largent-detourne/>.

¹⁴ See <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/burundi-medias-iwacu-mis-en-garde-par-le-cnc/>.

5. Exacerbation of subregional tensions

21. The deployment of the Burundian army along the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the extradition requests for former coup d'état leaders who took refuge in Rwanda are the source of tensions between Burundi and that country. On 11 January 2024, Burundi closed its land borders with Rwanda, accusing it of supporting the rebel group RED Tabara, which has claimed responsibility for a number of armed attacks carried out in Burundi since 2015. In addition, instability in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo risks spreading the conflict to the entire Great Lakes subregion.

6. Environmental challenges

22. In addition to land saturation (land and resources), Burundi is also facing threats to its natural environment. The noticeable effects of climate change threaten food security and livelihoods and are resulting in forced displacement and migration, which will increase demand for land in host areas. As a largely rural country highly reliant on land and resources for the population's subsistence, Burundi is among the five poorest countries in the world, with more than half the population living under the poverty line and 56 per cent of children suffering from stunting¹⁵ and malnutrition. The country's extreme vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, owing to its susceptibility to natural disasters (landslides and flooding), is compounded by its long history of conflict. Indeed, the sociopolitical crisis is increasing the poverty rate and population movements.

7. The rising cost of living and inflation

23. Repeated fuel shortages and rising commodity prices have been impairing economic activity¹⁶ since 2022. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has stated that at the end of 2023, the currency reserves of Burundi stood at US\$ 96.4 million, or only three weeks' imports cover. Burundi is one of the least productive countries in the world. According to forecasts, labour productivity in Burundi will reach only \$0.29 in 2024.¹⁷ The inequalities and uncertainty that especially affect vulnerable groups are among the major risk factors for conflict.

II. Situation of human rights

A. Civil and political rights

1. Right to participate in political and public affairs

24. In its concluding observations on the third periodic report of Burundi,¹⁸ the Human Rights Committee recommended that Burundi take all measures necessary, before the 2025 and 2027 elections, to:

- (a) Prevent violence and incitement to political and ethnic hatred, and promote a culture of political pluralism;
- (b) Ensure the full and meaningful enjoyment of electoral rights by everyone, including opposition political candidates and their supporters, and that all political parties can conduct an equal, free and transparent electoral campaign;
- (c) Review the restrictions on the right to stand for office with a view to bringing them into line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

¹⁵ See https://www.unicef.org/burundi/media/4616/file/FRA_Nutrition_Budget%20Brief%202023-24.pdf.

¹⁶ See <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/video/burundi-une-crise-economique-sans-precedent-2721986>.

¹⁷ See <https://www.insidermonkey.com/blog/20-least-productive-countries-in-the-world-1309542/5>.

¹⁸ CCPR/C/BDI/3.

(d) Conduct thorough and independent investigations into all allegations of violence, intimidation, torture and violations of fundamental freedoms against members and supporters of opposition parties, and bring the perpetrators of such acts to justice.¹⁹

25. On 9 April 2024, Parliament adopted a new Electoral Code; the cost of registering candidacies has been increased and will be reimbursed only to candidates who obtain at least 5 per cent of the vote. The Special Rapporteur fears that these measures will prevent many candidates from standing for election. The new Code also establishes that candidates who leave a political party must wait two years before they can run as independent candidates. This measure appears to be aimed specifically at Agathon Rwasa, the opposition figurehead who was ousted from the leadership of the *Congrès national pour la liberté* in March 2024, to prevent him from standing in the 2025 elections.

26. On 14 April 2024, the Catholic Church issued a public statement highlighting the failings of the judicial system and the economy and, above all, the loss of civil liberties. The statement stresses the need to strengthen the inclusion and participation of all political parties, including those of the opposition, and to organize transparent and credible legislative and municipal elections in 2025.

27. The succession of events surrounding the *Congrès national pour la liberté* since February 2023 has demonstrated the Government's desire to weaken and divide the opposition. On 17 January 2024, the Minister of the Interior, Community Development and Public Security, Mr. Martin Niteretse, wrote to the *Congrès national pour la liberté*, the main opposition party, accusing it of collaborating with a terrorist organization and threatening "consequences". This followed on from a letter which the party co-signed on 2 January 2024 and was sent by a platform of political groups and civil society actors to the guarantors of the Arusha Agreement, urging them to support the continued implementation of the Agreement.

28. On 26 February 2024, the *Congrès national pour la liberté* sent a letter to the Minister of the Interior, Community Development and Public Security, informing him of its intention to hold an extraordinary convention on 2 March 2024, with the resolution of the party's internal crisis on the agenda. In response, the Minister recommended that the party review and implement the recommendations contained in letter No. 530/3464/CAB/2023 of 2 June 2023 before considering organizing a national convention. The letter reiterated that the suspension of all party activities would remain in force as long as the legally recognized governing bodies and supporters showed no willingness to take any steps towards restoring serenity. In March and April 2023, the party convention expelled eight members of the Bureau who opposed Agathon Rwasa. In May 2023, the Minister of the Interior, Community Development and Public Security annulled the decisions taken at the convention, as he felt that the discussions had not been conducted in accordance with the party's statutes, and called for a new convention to be held. Agathon Rwasa contested the legality of this decision. On 2 March 2024, the Minister rejected Mr. Rwasa's request for authorization to hold an extraordinary convention but authorized the holding of an extraordinary convention of the members of the *Congrès national pour la liberté* who opposed Mr. Rwasa, in Ngozi on 10 March 2024, which resulted in his replacement as party leader by Nestor Girukwishaka, considered close to the CNDD-FDD,²⁰ for a five-year term. The police arrested several *Congrès national pour la liberté* supporters who were contesting the holding of the convention, including party deputies who were in attendance. The legality of the convention was also challenged by a faction of the *Congrès national pour la liberté* on the grounds that it was held in violation of the party's statutes.

29. The members of the National Independent Electoral Commission were appointed by Decree No. 100/238 of 11 December 2023. The unilateral and non-inclusive manner of their appointment has been underscored by a number of political actors;²¹ they were sworn in on 17 January 2024.

¹⁹ CCPR/C/BDI/CO/3, para. 48.

²⁰ See <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1545832/politique/au-burundi-lopposant-agathon-rwasa-se-fait-voler-son-parti/>.

²¹ See <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/ceni-le-senat-approuve-une-nouvelle-equipe/>.

2. Arbitrary arrests and detentions

30. Arbitrary arrests continued, mostly for political or rebellion-related reasons, given the prevailing security situation in Burundi. The arrests were made by the police, with the support of the Imbonerakure. On 16 May 2024, the police arrested 44 individuals in the town of Nyanza-Lac, in the province of Makamba, for supposed acts of “rebellion”. In December 2023, 13 members of the Congrès national pour la liberté were arbitrarily arrested on the grounds that they were taking part in an unauthorized meeting when in fact they were having drinks at a bar.

3. Enforced disappearances

31. The Special Rapporteur notes that, in the period covered by this report, it was difficult to corroborate certain cases of enforced disappearance brought to his attention because of the modus operandi in these cases. Analyses show, however, that enforced disappearance has been used to exert pressure on dissident voices, in particular political opponents, persons close to them and civil society organizations. In a number of documented cases, witnesses saw the victims get into a police vehicle or leave with officials of the National Intelligence Service. Many disappearances have also been reported by civil society organizations. Some victims were found dead a few days after their disappearance, with injuries indicating that they had been executed.

32. So far in 2024, the Forum pour la conscience et le développement has recorded 12 cases of enforced disappearance. The Special Rapporteur notes that the number of enforced disappearances fell in 2020. In most cases, the individuals cannot be found or were abducted with the support of the Imbonerakure then found in the custody of the National Intelligence Service. These are mainly members of the Congrès national pour la liberté or the Mouvement pour la solidarité et la démocratie who are associated with RED Tabara or accused of collaborating with the rebel group. The Special Rapporteur noted that people involved in private disputes had used the National Intelligence Service and the Imbonerakure to exert pressure on the opposing party. Many families still have no news of their loved ones, despite searching for them in official detention centres. According to the 2023 report of the State Department of the United States of America, published in April 2024, there are numerous reports of individuals being disappeared for political motives after being detained by members of the security forces or abducted, and the identity of the perpetrators is unclear.²²

4. Freedom of expression and freedom of information

33. The Special Rapporteur stresses the need to protect journalists, whistle-blowers and dissident voices. In the period covered by this report, the Special Rapporteur noted numerous signs of repression against media professionals, including threats, arrests, arbitrary detentions and attempted abductions. This climate has led several journalists to censor themselves for fear of reprisals.

34. Legislation governing the press was amended in 2013, 2015, 2018 and 2024. The National Assembly unanimously adopted the Press Bill at a plenary meeting on 7 May 2024. The Bill, which also covers community radio stations and online media, does not, however, limit oversight or excessive restrictions by the authorities. Initiated without broad consultation with all the key players, the Bill decriminalizes some press offences, making them subject to fines rather than imprisonment, but maintains criminal penalties for other offences. The proposed fine for decriminalized offences ranges from 500,000 to 1.5 million Burundi francs. The assessment of press offences is the prerogative of the judge, who may base the decision on the Criminal Code or the Cybercrime Act. Offences unrelated to research and the treatment or dissemination of information remain subject to the relevant provisions of the Criminal Code, in particular those dealing with breaches of State security.

35. Breaches of the freedoms of expression and information were recorded in 2023 and 2024. For example, Sandra Muhoza, a journalist for the online media La Nova, was arrested in Ngozi on 13 April 2024 by the National Intelligence Service, in collusion with a businessman who is an influential member of CNDD-FDD. She was transferred to the offices

²² See <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/burundi/>.

of the National Intelligence Service in Bujumbura, with complete disregard for the territorial jurisdiction of the police officers and public prosecutor under the Code of Judicial Organization and Jurisdiction. On 18 April 2024, she was ordered detained at the Mpimba central prison. Sandra Muhoza is accused of breach of State security and ethnic hate. She was implicated after information was shared in a WhatsApp chat group for media professionals about a rumour concerning a supposed stockpile of machetes possibly destined for use in attacks. On 6 May 2024, she was brought before the court in chambers; the investigation was largely conducted for the prosecution, in violation of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which requires judges to consider incriminating and exculpatory evidence.²³ Ms. Muhoza's case, like that of Floriane Irangabiye, illustrates the fact that the law and the justice system are being instrumentalized for political ends.

36. On 13 February 2024, the Cassation Chamber of the Supreme Court upheld the verdict handed down by the Bujumbura Court of Appeal on 2 May 2023, sentencing Floriane Irangabiye to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of F Bu 1 million for breach of State security.

37. The Special Rapporteur also noted an upsurge in attacks on freedom of the press. On 2 May 2024, the journalist Ahmadi Radjabu was arrested as he was recording footage of a fire at the Ruvumera market; he was detained for two weeks before being released. On 23 May 2024, Jean Noel Manirakiza, a correspondent for the newspaper *Iwacu*, suffered violations of his physical integrity and the confiscation of equipment. On the evening of 5 June 2024, Pascal Ntakirutimana, head of the political division of the *Iwacu* press group, was the victim of an attempted abduction by two police officers. On 6 June 2024, the *Iwacu* press group received a warning from the National Communication Council, which accused the group of serious professional misconduct in its treatment of certain unspecified topics. The Council banned the rebroadcasting of the episodes of Bonesha FM talk radio shows "Inkuru y' Imvaho" and "Tribune Bonesha" of 11 and 12 June 2024 on the grounds that the guests had exaggerated.²⁴ Lastly, on 25 and 26 June 2024, unidentified individuals threw rocks at *Iwacu* offices.

B. Other actors concerned by the mandate of the Special Rapporteur

1. National Independent Human Rights Commission

38. The Special Rapporteur notes that a special accreditation status review took place at the session of the Subcommittee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), held from 25 to 27 March 2024 and 29 April to 3 May 2024. The review was carried out for a number of reasons, including:

- Political interference with the recent appointment process for members of the National Independent Human Rights Commission;
- Reluctance on the part of the Commission to monitor and investigate politically sensitive cases involving members of the political opposition, high-profile political figures, members of the security forces or members of a youth group affiliated with a specific political party;
- A lack of action by the Burundian authorities to facilitate the Special Rapporteur's access to the country;
- The refusal to enter into dialogue with civil society organizations.

39. Following the review of the information and evidence provided by the National Independent Human Rights Commission, the Subcommittee on Accreditation announced its decision to recommend that the Commission be downgraded to B status.²⁵ The Commission challenged this decision under article 12.1 (ii) of the GANHRI Statute.

²³ See <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/burundi-medias-laffaire-sandra-muhoza-en-delibere/>.

²⁴ See <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/medias-securite-des-journalistes-des-signaux-rouges-a-la-veille-des-elections/>.

²⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/nhri/ganhri/SCA-Report-Second-Session-2024-FR.pdf>.

40. The Special Rapporteur notes that, in its 2023 annual report,²⁶ the Commission describes its contribution to the work of the treaty bodies and special procedures. The Special Rapporteur stresses that he sent a questionnaire to the Commission on 15 March 2024 to obtain information on the human rights situation in Burundi but did not receive an official response before finalizing the present report. The Commission's annual report is more descriptive than analytical and does not allow for a satisfactory assessment of the human rights situation, much less of the topics addressed in the present report. Nor does it discuss the restrictions on the civic space observed in 2023, for instance, interference by the Minister of Territorial Administration with the functioning of the Congrès national pour la liberté. The report merely states that: "The more established political parties conducted their daily activities as normal. The [National Independent Human Rights] Commission emphasizes that, although relations between the political parties have generally been satisfactory, there has been tension within the party [Congrès national pour la liberté], whose influential members continue to vie for leadership."²⁷ According to information gathered by the Special Rapporteur in relation to the extraordinary convention of dissident voices from the Congrès national pour la liberté, held on 2 March 2024 in Ngozi, a number of members of the party requested the Commission to intervene after several members were arrested by the police; the Commission failed to respond.

41. The Special Rapporteur recalls that, in his 2022 report,²⁸ he underscored the need for the National Independent Human Rights Commission to conduct systematic, credible investigations, particularly in the context of enforced disappearances, and the need to guarantee the Commission's formal and material independence in the fulfilment of its mandate. The Special Rapporteur notes that the Commission, in its 2023 annual report, documented 10 cases of enforced disappearance²⁹ but without confirming that they were indeed cases of enforced disappearance. The Special Rapporteur encourages the Commission to include the findings of its investigations in its annual reports. Several families and relatives of victims of enforced disappearance or arbitrary arrest informed the Special Rapporteur of the Commission's inaction when it came to following developments in their loved ones' cases. On several occasions, the members of the Commission whom they had contacted recommended that they follow up with the courts. The Commission took no action on the complaints by the families and relatives concerned.

42. Between May 2023 and February 2024, the Special Rapporteur received copies of correspondence sent by 18 Burundian civil society organizations to the National Independent Human Rights Commission, requesting its support, under its consultative mandate, for legal reforms which, in their view, could contribute to greater respect for civil liberties. The correspondence includes: an initial letter, dated 30 May 2023, in which the organizations call for the framework law on non-profit organizations to be amended; a second letter, dated 17 October 2023, in which they suggest that the law on public demonstrations and assemblies should be amended; and a third letter, dated 13 February 2024, in which they raise the process of amending the law on the organization and operation of political parties. These letters have gone unanswered. The Special Rapporteur notes that, while it claims in its 2023 annual report to cooperate with civil society organizations, both inside and outside the country, the Commission refrains from taking action on complaints regarding civil liberties and politically sensitive topics.

2. Civil society organizations

43. Civil society in Burundi is marked by divisions. It includes a marginal pro-Government group, which opposed the renewal of the Special Rapporteur's mandate in September 2023, as well as foreign organizations and Burundian organizations in exile that document the human rights situation in the country. The Special Rapporteur notes that pro-Government organizations do not publish reports on the human rights situation.

²⁶ See <https://www.cnidh.bi/documents/Rapport%20Annuel%20de%20la%20CNIDH,%20%C3%A9dition%202023.pdf>, para. 3.2.3.

²⁷ Ibid., para. 1.5.

²⁸ A/HRC/51/44, para. 79.

²⁹ <https://www.cnidh.bi/documents/Rapport%20Annuel%20de%20la%20CNIDH,%20%C3%A9dition%202023.pdf>, pp. 60–61.

Burundi-based organizations do not generally have the leeway or independence to serve as a checks and balances system or to intervene in any dialogue between the State and social actors. Despite the difficult context, civil society organizations in exile jointly publish communiqués and reports to inform national and international public opinion about the human rights situation.

44. Although organizations working on economic and social issues in Burundi carry out ordinary activities, some of them have been banned by the authorities. This was the case on 29 December 2023 when a conference organized by the Burundi-based association *Parole et action pour le réveil des consciences et l'évolution des mentalités* for the presentation of an annual analysis of the economic situation, governance and outlook was suspended. The reason for the suspension by the authorities was not given. In addition, organizations in exile document violations of fundamental rights. For the period from July 2023 to April 2024, *Ligue Iteka* reported 591 cases of arbitrary arrest, 43 cases of torture, 415 cases of extrajudicial execution, 25 cases of enforced disappearance and 129 cases of gender-based violence. Between August 2023 and May 2024, *Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture in Burundi (ACAT-Burundi)* reported 154 cases of extrajudicial execution, 151 cases of arbitrary arrest and 38 cases of torture.

C. Economic, social and cultural rights

1. Analysis of the budget law for 2023/24, “Vision Burundi: Emerging country by 2040, developed country by 2060”, and the macroeconomic situation

45. Burundi has adopted “Vision Burundi: Emerging country by 2040, developed country by 2060”, which enshrines the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is a sign that the country will be placing emphasis on international aid and foreign public investment. Burundi is experiencing an economic crisis characterized by a foreign currency shortage resulting in only three weeks’ imports cover and by high inflation, with an average of 27 per cent in 2023, which has adversely affected the availability and affordability of goods essential to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, while exacerbating economic inequalities. According to IMF projections,³⁰ some macroeconomic indicators are showing marked improvement. This is the case for economic growth, which has recovered to 2.7 per cent in 2023 and should reach 4.3 per cent in 2024. According to the same projections, inflation is forecast to average 22 per cent over 2024, and the latest available data from the Bank of the Republic of Burundi indicate annual inflation of 12.1 per cent in April 2024, compared with 20.1 per cent in December 2023. Nevertheless, the situation seems to be beyond the Government’s control. On 24 April 2024, the Prime Minister, Mr. Gervais Ndirakobuca, acknowledged before members of Parliament that the Government was powerless to cope with the many shortages in the country.

46. Double-digit inflation remains a problem and affects vulnerable groups especially. In this regard, the authorities’ efforts³¹ to strike the right balance between the necessary exchange rate unification and the reform’s potential impact on the right to an adequate standard of living for vulnerable groups are moving in the right direction. In practice, the 38 per cent depreciation of the Burundian franc against the United States dollar in May 2023 led to a sharp rise in commodity prices, particularly for imported goods, in a context of very low household purchasing power, without any corresponding reduction in the exchange premium on the parallel market.³² Poor households are particularly hard hit by food inflation, due in particular to the rising cost of imported products, increased expenditure on agricultural inputs and higher fuel and transport costs. This situation increases vulnerability and economic inequality among the population. The Special Rapporteur notes that, in the absence of structural reforms, vulnerabilities will increase, particularly in the event of shocks such as those triggered by the armed conflict in Ukraine and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which highlighted the volatility of the economy. In this situation, it is crucial to

³⁰ IMF, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2024.

³¹ *IMF Country Report*, No. 22/257, p. 17.

³² See <https://www.imf.org/fr/News/Articles/2024/01/22/pr2419-burundi-imf-staff-conducted-discussions-for-the-first-review-under-ecf-arrangement>.

mobilize budgetary resources to guarantee the protection of the entire population. The general State budget is \$1.387 billion for 2023/24, an increase of 63.9 per cent compared to 2022/23. This considerable increase is mainly thanks to efforts to mobilize resources through international aid, in particular donations. In 2020/21, spending on health, education, social protection, child protection, water, hygiene and sanitation accounted for 50.7 per cent of the total budget; in 2023/24, spending on these sectors was reduced to 26.6 per cent of the total budget, due to defence, security and infrastructure expenditures.

2. Right to food

47. The effects of climate change on agriculture, specifically rising temperatures and variable rainfall, are eroding productivity and leading to increased food insecurity and vulnerability. In a context where 80 per cent of households in Burundi make their living from agriculture and related activities, 23,109 households reported losing their crop fields and, according to food security sector estimates, nearly 40,000 hectares of fields were damaged out of just over 400,000 hectares of cultivable fields (or 10 per cent of the country's food crop area) in the agricultural season of the first half of 2024. These losses are having a major impact on household food security and livelihoods, especially as the areas affected are those that recurrently face food insecurity.

48. In the last three weeks of the period covered by the present report, the number and severity of shocks increased significantly. More than 9,300 people were displaced by torrential rains, landslides and flooding of the Ruzizi and Kinyankongue rivers and Lake Tanganyika.

3. Right to health

49. From 12 to 14 February 2024, Burundi held a national dialogue on health financing on the theme "Increasing resources for health financing in Burundi". Dependence on external financing remains high. In 2023/24, 7.35 per cent of the budget was allocated to health despite almost half of the population living below the poverty line. The health situation in Burundi remains uncertain in the face of epidemics, due to the weakness of health infrastructure and public services. At the time of writing, the cholera epidemic had been reported in eight health districts. Five of them (Bujumbura Nord, Bujumbura Centre, Bujumbura Sud, Kabezi and Isare) have reported an increase in cholera cases, with the worst affected being the Bujumbura districts and the Isare district. A comparison between the first 20 weeks of 2023 and the same period in 2024 shows an increase in cholera cases of around 10 per cent. The resurgence of epidemics (malaria, polio, cholera and measles) and the socioeconomic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic are exacerbating humanitarian needs. According to the health accounts, per capita spending on health is around \$30, whereas the World Health Organization standard is \$112 and the benchmark commitment for health spending set in the 2001 Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases is 15 per cent of the budget.

50. For the 2023/24 financial year, the amount allocated to health – F Bu 337.4 billion (compared with F Bu 228.7 billion in 2022/23) – represents 7.35 per cent of the national budget (compared with 9.6 per cent in 2022/23). This relative decline can be explained by the increase in spending in other sectors (infrastructure, production, defence, security, etc.), which caused a sharp rise in the overall budget and therefore a reduction in the proportion of spending allocated to health care. Further efforts are indispensable if Burundi is to reach the 15 per cent target agreed in the Abuja Declaration.³³

51. The Special Rapporteur notes that the recent floods have contributed to the spread of infectious diseases and malaria-carrying mosquitoes.

4. Right to education

52. Between October 2023 and March 2024, more than 184,000 people were affected by natural disasters in the country (compared with 106,000 people in 2022), of whom more than

³³ See https://www.unicef.org/burundi/media/4611/file/FRA_Sante%CC%81%20Budget%20Brief%202023-24.pdf.

30,000 were displaced. In addition, 6,000 homes and over 100 classrooms were destroyed, particularly in communities along Lake Tanganyika. In the localities of Gatumba, Buganda, Gihanga, Mpanda, Mutimbuzi, Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac, more than 14,700 children lost their schools supplies in the floods. Across the country, more than 200 classrooms were flooded or damaged, with some forced to close temporarily due to extensive damage. Following the Government's decision to relocate the population of the flooded areas in Gatumba to sites in Mubimbi and Kabezi, around 100 children who came with their families are now being welcomed and integrated, albeit with difficulty, in schools located in the vicinity of the place of relocation. As a result, overcrowding and a lack of teaching materials are likely to disrupt learning. The United Nations Children's Fund is accelerating the installation of a mobile school in Mubimbi to enable children to complete the school year. The high cost of living is likely to increase the number of school dropouts. The Minister of the Interior, Community Development and Public Security recently prohibited young people from crossing borders to seek employment in neighbouring countries during school holidays. The ban also affects vulnerable families in search of livelihoods and exposes those who defy the ban to the risk of being accused of complicity with rebel groups.

5. Situation of refugees

53. The Special Rapporteur acknowledges that host countries are struggling to provide vital services to the refugees in their territory amid declining funding. He wishes to remind them, however, of the need to respect their international commitments, to contribute to the dignified treatment of refugees and to continue their efforts to ensure such treatment.

54. On 28 May 2024, 19 civil society organizations issued a statement on the forced repatriation of Burundian refugees by the United Republic of Tanzania.³⁴ They denounced discriminatory practices towards Burundian refugees, the destruction of refugees' fields, the closure of small business stands, the confiscation of motorcycles, severe restrictions on movement, the closure of schools and health facilities, and the exposure of women and children to sexual violence and other forms of physical and psychological abuse. The Special Rapporteur also received reports of allegations that the Tanzanian authorities were forcibly returning Burundian refugees. This pressure has reportedly gone hand in hand with an intensification of hostile discourse.³⁵

55. The Special Rapporteur notes that, as of 30 June 2024, the United Republic of Tanzania was hosting 157,362 Burundian refugees. Following the transmission of excerpts from an unedited version of the Special Rapporteur's report to the Permanent Mission of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, the Tanzanian Government issued a note verbale³⁶ stating that it was complying with its international and regional commitments to protect the rights of refugees despite the fact that the case of Burundian refugees is among the least-funded situations in the world and that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and relevant partners in the United Republic of Tanzania have cut their budgets by 30 per cent. The acute shortage of funds is having a serious impact on the coordination, supervision and delivery of humanitarian services to refugees, including the provision of food and health services. The reduction in funding has led to the closure of health centres in refugee camps and a 50-percent reduction in the number of health practitioners, and signs of increased morbidity and mortality have been observed. While welcoming the hospitality shown by the United Republic of Tanzania to Burundian refugees, the Special Rapporteur encourages the Tanzanian authorities to continue their efforts to protect the rights of refugees and calls for the guarantees surrounding the return of Burundian refugees to meet the requirements of legal, physical and material security.

56. The Special Rapporteur spoke with some Burundian refugees who had returned to their country but were now emigrating again. They highlighted the impact of various factors

³⁴ See <https://sostortureburundi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/URGENT-Stop-au-rapatriement-force-des-refugies-burundais-en-Tanzanie.pdf>.

³⁵ See <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240124-la-tanzanie-veut-renvoyer-les-r%C3%A9fugi%C3%A9s-pr%C3%A9sents-sur-son-sol-dans-leur-pays-d'origine>.

³⁶ Note verbale, ref. NC291/738 of 9 July 2024.

on every aspect of their lives. These include basic protection concerns, such as the need to avoid political tensions and pressure from the Imbonerakure, but also concerns about access to fundamental economic, social and cultural rights and basic services, such as the right to work, including access to safe and healthy working conditions, and the rights to health, education and an adequate standard of living, including the rights to food and adequate housing.

57. The Special Rapporteur's assessment of the conditions under which Burundian refugees have returned to their country is mixed. The budget law provides for a budget of F Bu 4,785,884 for the 2023/24 financial year, a paltry amount given the refugees' multifaceted needs and the increasingly difficult economic situation.

6. Persistent discrimination against women

58. In the context of the universal periodic review, Burundi took note of recommendations to consider ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, to amend legal provisions that discriminate on the basis of gender and to ensure equality between men and women in matters of inheritance, arguing that certain elements of the recommendations were contrary to the country's beliefs, mores and customs.³⁷

59. In March and April 2024, the Administration, assisted by the police and the Imbonerakure, pressured cohabiting couples, particularly in the north of the country, in Ngozi, Kayanza and Kirundo, for instance. The situation has given rise to numerous human rights violations and abuses. In some cases, women in cohabiting relationships, along with their children, have been sent back to their parents' homes. In other cases, families have been separated, children have been separated from their mothers and forced to live with their father's first wife, or men have been forced to live with their first wife.³⁸

60. Burundian law appears to be contradictory on the question of cohabitation. Article 554 of the Criminal Code establishes that: "A spouse found to have maintained a cohabiting partner is liable to a fine of F Bu 50,000 to F Bu 100,000. The penalty is doubled when the cohabitation takes place in the marital home. Proceedings can only be initiated on the complaint of the spouse claiming to have been harmed. The complainant may, in any event, put an end to proceedings by withdrawing the complaint." Article 24 of the 2016 law on victim protection and the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence, states that: "De facto unions are prohibited throughout the territory of Burundi." Furthermore, under article 42, "any person found guilty of being in a de facto union known as *ugucikiza* or *ugucikira* is liable to imprisonment for 1 to 3 months and a fine of F Bu 100,000 to F Bu 200,000." The Criminal Code of 2017 takes precedence over this 2016 law. The pressure exerted by the Administration appears to be a political decision subjecting cohabiting couples to the whim of the authorities. According to article 43 of the Constitution, "no one may be subjected to arbitrary interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence or to attacks on his or her honour or reputation."

61. The current situation around cohabitation illustrates the need to revise the law on gender-based violence and harmonize the domestic legal framework. Some provisions of the 2016 law should be repealed, including the provision on incitement to gender-based violence, in particular references to "indecent attire", and provisions dealing with false accusations, de facto unions and extramarital relationships. Furthermore, the definition of rape should be harmonized across Burundian law to include the lack of consent, provide penalties for harmful traditional practices and clarify women's reproductive health rights.

³⁷ See <https://www.ungeneva.org/fr/news-media/meeting-summary/2023/10/afternoon-human-rights-council-adopts-universal-periodic-0>.

³⁸ See <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240405-burundi-des-centaines-de-concubines-chass%C3%A9es-de-leurs-m%C3%A9nages-par-les-autorit%C3%A9s-au-nom-de-l-ordre-moral>.

D. Uncertain land rights as a potential source of conflict

62. The population density in Burundi is very high compared with the average African country. Although the area of arable land in the country is clearly rising (1,270,000 hectares in 2021),³⁹ there has been a gradual loss of productivity, with a drop in the amount of arable land available per person, which has stabilized at an average of 0.1 hectares (or 1,000 m²) per person in recent years. Yet land is the main source of income and livelihood in Burundi.⁴⁰ This statistic can be explained by the constant increase in the number of land seekers/users due to the high rate of population growth.⁴¹ This situation is worrying in more ways than one:

- In Burundi, 90 per cent of the population lives in rural areas and is heavily dependent on land for both income generation and subsistence. For these people, access to land and long-term land rights are a matter of survival.
- Land grabbing by elites, particularly those in power, is reducing customary land areas.
- The average 0.1 hectare of arable land available per person seems to be an extremely limited area to ensure a decent living for rural households. This statistic is an indicator of the pressure on land and the high level of land saturation in Burundi. It is also an indicator of the tension around land access and control. Scarcity has the effect of increasing the value of land and attracting the interest of the economic, administrative, political and military elites.⁴² The risk is that vulnerable populations (young people, women, returning Burundian refugees) will find it difficult to obtain access to land and thus their livelihoods. Access to land remains a key factor in the realization of all people's rights, including the right to food.⁴³ Inequalities and the resulting instability for vulnerable groups constitute one of the major risks of conflict in Burundi.
- The high value of land, which is a consequence of land saturation in the country, is likely to push Burundians to remain abroad. The elites thus acquire vast tracts of land for private investments of various kinds.
- Land saturation is made worse by landslides and, above all, by flooding triggered by heavy equatorial rains. These two phenomena are reducing usable land and increasing the precarious situation of the population at a time when the State has limited means to provide aid.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

63. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government of Burundi:**

- (a) **Reduce the risks identified to attract more investors to Burundi and ease social tensions;**
- (b) **Ensure that the Imbonerakure do not take part in investigations, do not possess weapons and cease reprisals against the population;**
- (c) **Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, prevent enforced disappearances, conduct objective investigations into enforced disappearances and bring the perpetrators to justice;**
- (d) **Assess the electoral process and ensure full respect for human rights before, during and after elections;**

³⁹ See <https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/AG.LND.ARBL.HA?locations=BI>.

⁴⁰ See <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/country/Burundi/OIM%20Burundi%20-%20Logement%2C%20Terre%20et%20Propriete%20-%20Septembre%202022.pdf>.

⁴¹ According to the World Bank, the population of Burundi grew by 2.7 per cent in 2022. See <https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/SP.POP.GROW?locations=BI>.

⁴² See "The situation of human rights in Burundi. Joint quarterly analysis report (October-December 2023)", Mouvement Inamahoro, SOS-Torture Burundi, Forum pour le renforcement de la société civile, Ligue Iteka and Forum pour la conscience et le développement, April 2024.

⁴³ See Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights general comment No. 26 (2022).

(e) Cooperate with international human rights protection mechanisms of the United Nations and the African Union by once again receiving special procedures mandate holders and implementing their recommendations and those of the treaty bodies;

(f) Resolve the root causes of conflict in Burundi by agreeing to an inclusive national dialogue with all components of Burundian society, including actors in exile;

(g) Release imprisoned journalists and human rights activists, including Floriane Irangabiye and Sandra Muhoza;

(h) Subsidize certain food and non-food products to better support households;

(i) Build the capacity of key actors to develop intelligent flood forecasting and early warning systems capable of providing communities with timely information to protect lives and property in the face of increasingly frequent floods;

(j) Develop a knowledge base and build capacity in the area of climate security in Burundi, with a long-term perspective, by establishing the role of climate security advisor to support the assessment climate risks as well as the design and implementation of related policies;

(k) Establish an exhaustive diagnosis of the land situation as an essential prerequisite for the peaceful return of refugees, and subsequently initiate land reform to protect the rights of all land users;

(l) Promote greater security of tenure and access to land, especially for vulnerable people, by initiating land reform with the participation of rights holders, including women;

(m) Reopen the borders with Rwanda;

(n) Use the principles on housing and property restitution for refugees and displaced persons (Pinheiro Principles) as a basis for realizing the rights of refugees and displaced persons to housing and property restitution;

(o) Guarantee the independence of the National Independent Human Rights Commission so that it complies with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles);

(p) Support human rights monitoring mechanisms prior to elections;

(q) Promote the harmonization of the domestic legal framework and ensure its conformity with international and regional standards for the protection of women's rights, particularly with regard to gender-based violence, and ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa;

(r) Redouble efforts to tackle the causes of the crises in Burundi and to engage in dialogue on best practices for the return of refugees.

64. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the National Independent Human Rights Commission:

(a) Ensure credible monitoring of respect for all human rights in Burundi, provide the findings of the investigations it conducts and produce credible analytical reports on the human rights situation in the country, taking care to present its actions to all stakeholders and explain to them its obligation of conduct;

(b) Effectively play its consultative role with the Government, particularly with regard to civil liberties;

(c) Demonstrate independence by providing assistance to all actors, including political opponents.

65. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions continue in a constructive manner its review of the A status of the National Independent Human Rights Commission.

66. The Special Rapporteur recommends that religious leaders continue their advocacy for an inclusive reconciliation process and the organization of credible and peaceful elections in Burundi.

67. The Special Rapporteur recommends that civil society organizations:

- (a) Establish monitoring networks and advocate a return to the rule of law;
- (b) Initiate discussions on ways out of the crisis in Burundi, while remaining mobilized and continuing to work for the protection and promotion of human rights in the country.

68. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the media maintain constant, in-depth coverage of the human rights situation to inform and alert national and international public opinion.

69. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights inform the Human Rights Council of developments in its cooperation with Burundi.

70. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the United Nations system:

- (a) Continue to support the Government in its efforts to combat climate change, and conduct analyses to prevent conflicts linked to pressure on natural resources and to support communities affected by flooding;
- (b) Build the capacity of key actors to address climate-related security risks as part of national policymaking and planning processes;
- (c) Invest in monitoring systems to strengthen knowledge of the links between climate change, environmental degradation and socioeconomic crisis in Burundi.

71. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the East African Community:

- (a) Mobilize the guarantors of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi, including the United Nations and the United Republic of Tanzania, to encourage them to ease political tensions and promote the resumption of dialogue;
- (b) Facilitate a resolution of the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and re-establish dialogue between Burundi and Rwanda.

72. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the international community:

- (a) Strengthen the protection of human rights, particularly in the run-up to the legislative and municipal elections;
- (b) Focus support for Burundi on achieving tangible results in the area of human rights, particularly in terms of civic space, the rule of law and accountability, with particular emphasis on the protection of media professionals, political opponents and human rights defenders before, during and after the 2025 legislative and municipal elections;
- (c) Support Burundian civil society organizations in their efforts to monitor the human rights situation before, during and after the 2025 elections;
- (d) Contribute to greater protection of the rights of Burundian refugees by allocating sufficient resources to meet their needs.

73. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the European Union, in its collaboration with Burundi, ensure that the support it provides contributes to the organization of free, credible and transparent elections in 2025.

74. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Human Rights Council encourage special procedures mandate holders to visit Burundi.

75. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the African Union make the African Humanitarian Agency operational and provide it with real means of action.

76. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights:

(a) Continue its efforts to establish a framework for dialogue with the United Republic of Tanzania to guarantee effective protection for Burundian refugees;

(b) Maintain a framework for constructive dialogue with the Burundian authorities, and carry out country visits.

77. The Special Rapporteur recommends that armed groups and militias refrain from committing any human rights abuses and attacks against the territory, institutions and people of Burundi.
