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Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 December 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).



Dramatic surge in human rights violations in Burundi

Society for Threatened Peoples is deeply concerned about the massive increase in human rights violations in Burundi since April 2015. Burundi has been in the midst of a political crisis and human rights crisis that has driven more than 220,000 people, mostly women and children, fleeing to safety in neighboring countries since President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for a controversial third term. The opposition claimed the move was unconstitutional and violated the terms of a peace accord that ended the country's 13-year civil war in 2005, but supporters of the president argued that he should be allowed to stand for office again because he was not popularly elected in his first term. The human rights situation in Burundi rapidly has been deteriorating since April 2015, notably the freedom of expression, assembly and association. Most private radio stations have been closed, newspapers were shut down and journalists intimidated and harassed. More than 100 journalists have fled the country and asked for protection in neighboring states. Numerous human rights activists have been harassed, deliberately arrested or murdered. The targeted extrajudicial killings of dozens of young men, living in suburbs of the capital which have seen public protests against the government, after attacks on three military camps on December 11 have raised fears of a civil war and mass atrocities.

Since November 2015, thirteen leading national human rights organizations have been shut down by the authorities in a massive clampdown campaign against critical voices in the civil society. Free speech has been muzzled by the authorities. Even torture and other illegal measures have been used by Burundian security forces to extract so called "confessions" and silence dissent. Furthermore, public protest has been crushed by excessive lethal force, even against children and women. So far there has been complete impunity for these crimes.

We are deeply alarmed about the speeches by leading officials. These attempts to incite ethnic hatred are reinforcing fears of mass atrocities and genocide. Targeted ethnic killing could revive the Hutu – Tutsi confrontation. Furthermore it could stir a wider armed conflict in East Africa.

Therefore, Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council:

- To establish an official "Inquiry Commission on Human Rights in Burundi" with an extended mandate to document all human rights violations which have been committed since April 2015. The planned research mission by OHCHR would deliver only an impression of the alarming surge of human rights violations in recent time, but would not have a mandate to cover the broad extent of human rights violations since the political crisis started in April 2015. Only a broad-based approach could end impunity.
- To urge the Security Council and the African Union to prepare a Hybrid Peace Keeping Mission to Burundi on the basis of the Security Council resolution of November 12, 2015.
- To urge the Government of Burundi to stop intimidating and harassing human rights organizations and other NGOs to end arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, torture and other ill-treatment and to stop impunity.