



Burundi Election Statement

18 May 2020

International inertia as election tensions flare in Burundi

Political violence is escalating sharply in Burundi, with only two days to go before presidential, legislative and local elections on 20 May.

The Burundi Human Rights Initiative (BHRI) has documented several killings of members of the main opposition party, the CNL, by members of the youth league of the ruling CNDD-FDD, the *Imbonerakure*, including during the campaign period which ended yesterday. Statements by police spokesperson Pierre Nkurikiye blaming 95 percent of incidents of violence on the CNL not only lack credibility but expose a blatant lack of neutrality by the national police force.

“There is a shocking inertia by international actors,” said Lane Hartill from BHRI. “How many more people have to be beaten to death or locked up arbitrarily before governments wake up and take action? It will be much harder to put the brakes on the violence after the elections.”

Arrests of CNL members have rocketed during the campaign period, with more than 260 arrests reported by Burundian human rights groups and media, and more than 200 by the CNL (as of 8 May). The real number could be higher as not all cases are reported. Many of these arrests are arbitrary and appear designed to thwart the CNL in the elections. In contrast, very few *Imbonerakure* responsible for most of the political violence have been arrested or brought to justice.

Emerging electoral irregularities have deepened many Burundians’ mistrust of the national electoral commission, and there will be no international election observers. Although the elections are taking place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Burundian government has taken very few robust measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Huge crowds have gathered to listen to CNDD-FDD and CNL leaders during campaign rallies, with no social distancing.

Temperatures are rising in the ranks of both the CNL and the CNDD-FDD, and members of the two parties have clashed, with injuries on both sides. The particular brutality of some *Imbonerakure*, and



the willingness of the CNDD-FDD leadership to allow them to continue attacking their opponents, strikes fear in the hearts of many Burundians.

“If nothing is done to defuse the tension, a further escalation of violence is inevitable,” said Lane Hartill. “The Burundian government has shamelessly ignored flagrant attacks against political opponents before and during the election campaign. It is high time international actors took a firm public position.”

Public statements should go beyond tepid expressions of concern or formulaic language about free and fair elections. They should condemn the political violence unequivocally and urge party leaders to hold their members to account. BHRI also appealed to governments and regional organisations to hold frank talks with the two main presidential candidates.

For further information, please write to contact@burundihri.org or +1 267 896 3399 (WhatsApp). BHRI's publications are available at www.burundihri.org/english or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/@BHRI_IDHB.