

Committee: Security Council

Issue: The Situation in Burundi

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INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Burundi is a country situated in Southeastern Africa with a population of 11 million. It is considered as one of the poorest countries in the world. In the past, Burundi was a Belgian colony. It gained independence in 1962, and since then it is plagued by endless deadly conflicts sparked by ethnic rivalries and power struggles. After the end of a long civil war, Burundi experienced a decade of relative prosperity, economic growth, and political stability. However, the situation changed in 2015, when the (then) two-term President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to alter (or even violate, as the opposition argues) the constitution and run for a third term. Nkurunziza's move made the opposition and many Burundians furious, who interpreted it as a first step towards a totalitarian regime and the end of democracy in the country. Countless protests occurred, which the President violently suppressed using the armed youth wing of the ruling party. The turmoil of that era left thousands of people dead and hundreds of thousands displaced in neighboring countries. The political turmoil not only had a direct humanitarian cost but also influenced Burundi's already weak economy, with many states sanctioning the country by suspending their aid packages, something that dramatically reduced healthcare and education spending, resulting to the deepening of the humanitarian crisis. In mid-2018 the Security Council (SC) welcomed a statement by president Nkurunziza who rejected re-election in 2020. However, the SC insisted that measures have to be taken by the international community to ensure fair and peaceful elections in order to avoid a repetition of the events of 2015.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

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CNDD-FFD (National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy)

CNDD-FFD is the ruling party of Burundi, which supports President Nkurunziza.

FNL (National Forces of Liberation)

FNL is the main source of opposition to Nkurunziza’s government. The party’s leader and significant figure is Agathon Rwas.

Imbonerakure

Imbonerakure is the youth wing of the CNDD-FFD. During the pre-2015 election period, the UN accused it of secretly arming in order to terrorize citizens and gain support for President Nkurunziza for the upcoming elections.

Hutu

The Hutu are a Burundian ethnic group, currently consisting of 80%¹ of the nation’s population. The Hutu had many conflicts with another ethnic group, the Tutsi.

Tutsi

The Tutsi are the second largest ethnic group in Burundi, currently consisting of 14%² of the nation’s population. During Belgian colonialism and for the early years after independence, the Tutsis occupied almost every position of power, something that infuriated the Hutus and resulted in two genocides, the first committed in 1972 by the Tutsi-led army and the second one in 1993 by the Hutu populace against the Tutsi minority.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historic Context

¹ “Burundi” CIA World Factbook, < <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/by.html> >

² “Burundi” CIA World Factbook, < <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/by.html> >

Burundi was a Belgian colony until 1962 when it declared independence. Since then the country has seen two genocides (mentioned above) and a civil war which lasted from 1993 to 2005 and killed approximately 300,000 people. The aforementioned events were triggered by the ethnic divide between the Hutu and the Tutsi. In 2005 the civil war ended, a peace agreement was reached via international mediation and a constitution that allowed the citizens of Burundi to vote was adopted. In the first democratic elections for more than a decade, the CNDD-FDD, a Hutu led party that fought in the civil war, gained power. Pierre Nkurunziza, supported by the CNDD-FDD, became the first post-Civil War President of the country. After the end of the Civil War and under Nkurunziza the country enjoyed relative stability and economic growth.

A Multidimensional Crisis

On the 25th of April 2015, Nkurunziza announced that he would run for a 3rd term in office. This was considered by the opposition and many citizens as an unconstitutional move and a power play. The next day, riots broke out in Bujumbura, the Burundian capital. In May the supreme court was forced to approve Nkurunziza's amendment due to threats made by Nkurunziza appointed officials and army leaders. Again, demonstrators took the streets, this time not only in the capital but also in various regions of the country.

Nkurunziza did not back down. And the men of the Imbonerakure, the armed youth wing of the President's party attacked the opposition and critics. A UN report states that "the Imbonerakure, have become more repressive and are operating with almost total impunity ... the group harasses and intimidates the population with the approval and effective control of the ruling party and the government."³ Since the beginning of the crisis, the chaos caused by the oppressors left approximately 1,200 people dead and as of February 2018, the UNHCR has reported that 428,000 refugees have fled Burundi into neighboring countries. The UN Security Council has stated that it is disturbed by the reports of torture and

³ "UN: Some Burundi Violations May Constitute Crimes Against Humanity" Voice of America (VOA) News, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/un-some-violations-in-burundi-may-constitute-crimes-against-humanity/4558636.html>>

CGS MUN

forced disappearances in the country, while on the same time the UN Human Rights chief has condemned the youth wing of the ruling party.

In addition to the thousands of people that were killed and the hundreds of thousands that have sought refuge, the political crisis resulted in a wider humanitarian one. Burundi, already a poor country pre-2015, has shifted its healthcare and education spending towards security spending. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi said that “increasing debt and the burden on women looking after families, had turned Burundi from a developing country to a humanitarian emergency”⁴. There are reports that in Burundi, a country of 11 million people, there are only 500 doctors, 100 of whom have fled the country after the crisis started.⁵

One of the things that worsen Burundi’s humanitarian situation is the economic crisis that was a direct result of the political one. Between 2004 (one year before Nkurunziza gained power) and 2014 (one year before the outbreak of the political crisis), Burundi had an annual average growth of 4.2%. However, in 2015 the Burundian economy had a contraction of -3.9%⁶, which continues until today. The worsening of the economy resulted in worse living conditions for the average Burundian.

The economic crisis was not only directly caused by the political crisis but also, due to sanctions imposed on Burundi by the international community. The European Union, which pre-2015 was the nation’s highest foreign aid donor, reacted to Nkurunziza’s actions by suspending its aid packages to the country. The EU aid for the period of 2014 to 2020 was estimated to 432 million euros. Many western countries also threatened to cut back on aid, something that worsened the climate for international investment, leaving the country poorer. The International

⁴ “Burundi still committing crimes against humanity: UN report” africanews, <<http://www.africanews.com/2018/09/05/burundi-still-committing-crimes-against-humanity-un-report/>>

⁵ “Burundi economy battered by years of political crisis” Daily Nation, <<https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/Burundi-economy-battered-by-years-of-political-crisis/1066-4737784-fji6thz/index.html>>

⁶ “Burundi economy battered by years of political crisis” Daily Nation, <<https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/Burundi-economy-battered-by-years-of-political-crisis/1066-4737784-fji6thz/index.html>>

Crisis Group, an NGO that monitors international disputes and humanitarian crises, has urged the EU and other countries that stopped funding Burundi to re-introduce their aid packages in order to help the country recover from the humanitarian crisis. On the other hand, China and Russia have pledged to increase their investment in the conflict-torn country. China is investing heavily in the country's rail network and mining industry (Burundi is a country rich in natural resources). Some officials from China and Russia have threatened that they would veto a Security Council resolution that would meddle with Burundi's sovereignty. This creates frictions in the relations between the West and the Russo-Chinese axis, having the former accusing the latter of exploiting human rights violations made by an increasingly autocratic leader, for economic gains and geopolitical influence in the greater region.⁷

Something that makes the issue even more complex is the fact that President Nkurunziza, with the approval of the Parliament, made Burundi the first country ever to withdraw from the International Criminal Court. The ICC claims however that its decisions are still binding and has opened an investigation into the Burundi situation.⁸ Moreover, the President has rejected the placement of UN Peacekeepers because he claims that they violate Burundi's sovereignty.

President Nkurunziza has stated in mid-2018 that he will not stand for re-election in 2020 despite the fact that the recently amended constitution allows him to stay in power until 2034⁹. The Security Council has welcomed with caution this statement while insisting that measures have to be taken to guarantee fair and peaceful elections.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Republic of Burundi

⁷ "How the West Lost Burundi" Foreign Policy, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/28/how-the-west-lost-burundi/>>

⁸ "ICC judges authorise opening of an investigation regarding Burundi situation" International Criminal Court (ICC) <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/pages/item.aspx?name=pr1342>>

⁹ "Burundian president says to leave presidency in 2020" China Daily, <<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201806/07/WS5b19234da31001b82571ebca.html>>

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The official stance of the government of Burundi (lead by President Nkurunziza and the CNDD-FFD) is that there are no human rights violations in the country and any installment of UN Peacekeepers should be considered as a violation of the country's sovereignty.

People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation

Both China and Russia have seen an economic and geopolitical opportunity after the 2015 events in Burundi. Increased investment and the unprecedentedly close relationship between the leaders of China and Burundi have led to mutual support. An example is China's commitment to protect Burundian sovereignty in the UN Security Council. President Nkurunziza in return has supported China in recent allegations of spying in the African Union, claiming that the allegations are a result of western propaganda that wants to harm the very close relationship between Africa and China.¹⁰ In any case, both China and Russia would like to maintain the status quo and keep the legitimate leader of Burundi, Nkurunziza, in power.

United States of America

Former Secretary of State, John Kerry, has stated that the U.S. is "deeply concerned" about the situation in Burundi. Moreover, the human rights violations were condemned and threats to suspend aid to Burundi were made but did not materialize.

European Union (EU)

As a former Belgian colony, Burundi's ties with the EU are strong, and the EU played an important role in the prosperity and stabilization of the country after the civil war. However, the EU is one of the fiercest critics of President Nkurunziza's recent actions. At the beginning of the crisis and after various independent organizations such as the UN and the Human Rights Watch, reported that human rights violations were committed in Burundi, the EU suspended its aid and strongly condemned the situation. The EU supports an international peacekeeping effort in

¹⁰ "Burundi's Nkurunziza disregards report accusing China of spying on AU" PM News Nigeria, <<https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2018/02/07/burundis-nkurunziza-disregards-report-accusing-china-spying-au/>>

order to avoid a further escalation of the crisis and wants the ones responsible for the human rights violations to be held accountable.

African Union (AU)

The AU has been concerned about the latest developments in Burundi and it is willing to provide peacekeepers and material support in order to ease the situation in the country and achieve peace and prosperity for the Burundian people.

United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Burundi

A UN commission, created by the Human Rights Council that has the responsibility to “Conduct a thorough investigation into human rights violations and abuses in Burundi since April 2015, including on their extent and whether they may constitute international crimes, with a view to contributing to the fight against impunity and identify alleged perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses in Burundi with a view to ensuring full accountability.”¹¹

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1923	Belgium receives League of Nations mandate to administer the area that is now known as Burundi
1962	Burundi becomes independent and a separate kingdom
2005	After decades of ethnic conflict between Tutsi and Hutu, Burundi adopts a new constitution and Nkurunziza gains power
2010	Nkurunziza is re-elected in an uncontested poll after the opposition parties boycotted the vote, claiming that Nkurunziza rigged earlier regional elections
2013	Nkurunziza passes a law that restricts media. It was widely criticized as a law that goes against the freedom of the press

¹¹ “Commission of Inquiry on Burundi” UN Human Rights Council, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/coiburundi/pages/coiburundi.aspx>>

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2014	High ranking UN official is ordered to leave the country after he claimed that the youth wing of the CNDD-FFD was arming in order to influence the election result
May 2015	Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term is approved by the constitutional court. This decision resulted in mass protests and violence. An attempted army coup d' Etat fails.
June 2015	The Vice-President leaves the country because he opposed Nkurunziza's third term plan.
July 2015	President Nkurunziza wins the elections for a third term in office with 70% of the vote. The opposition leader Agathon Rwaswa describes the polls as a "joke".
March 2016	The EU suspends foreign aid to Burundi
October 2016	Burundi withdraws from the International Criminal Court
August 2016	UN Peacekeepers are not accepted in the country. Nkurunziza claims that they violate Burundi's sovereignty
2017	ICC judges approve the opening of a full investigation into alleged crimes against humanity in Burundi.
May 2018	A constitutional reform that will allow Nkurunziza to stay in power until 2034 is passed
June 2018	Nkurunziza states that he will not seek re-election in 2020

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES, AND EVENTS

- NOVEMBER 2015, **S/RES/2248**: The Security Council expressed its intention to consider additional measures against any Burundians who promote or allow the continuation of violence and also requested an update on the situation by the Secretary-General within 15-days

- APRIL 2016, **S/RES/2279**: The Security Council requested the Secretary-General to provide options to increase UN presence in Burundi via a police component.

- JULY 2016, **S/RES/2303**: This Security Council resolution addresses the issue of dialogue between all the parties involved in the conflict, condemns the violence of the previous months and establishes a UN police force for Burundi (Something that is not accepted by Nkurunziza in August)

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The UNSC did propose the imposition of peacekeepers, however, President Nkurunziza denied, stating that peacekeepers would violate Burundi's sovereignty.

The EU imposed a form of economic sanctions by suspending its aid to the country, something that may have reduced Nkurunziza's popularity and raise awareness for the situation abroad, however, it also had detrimental consequences to the average Burundian.

Note: The above attempts to solve the issue happened during or shortly after the 2015 crisis. The focus of this committee will be on preventing the events from repeating. Thus, delegates are encouraged to think of original solutions.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The Burundian crisis is a multidimensional crisis. That's why the delegates must consider solutions for many different issues.

Firstly, the delegates must address the issue of violence and security of the Burundian people. In a country with a turbulent past and constantly high political tensions, a solution that the UNSC can consider for the safety of the civilians is the imposition of peacekeepers (either from the UN or the AU). However, the delegates must be aware of Nkurunziza's past actions of rejecting peacekeepers, due to the alleged violation of the country's sovereignty.

The delegates must also set electoral integrity as a priority. In the past, there have been allegations of electoral misconduct, that is why the delegates

must consider solutions such as international observers for the scheduled 2020 elections.

Another important issue is the one of the humanitarian crisis and how it should be dealt with considering the sanctions and the suspension of aid from various states. The delegates can consider targeting funds to specific sectors (such as healthcare and education) and setting conditions to these funds (such as monitoring of their destination from international observers). The issue of assistance to refugees should also be addressed with solutions such as UNHCR funding to improve their living conditions.

The issue of freedom of the press and other human rights violations must also be addressed by the delegates. A possible solution could be funding to independent radio or TV stations.

The delegates must in any case act in a preventative way and ensure that there would be no repetition for the 2015 events. In order to achieve that, delegates should consider ways in which the international community can ensure that the Burundian President would keep its promise for not running for re-election and avoid an almost certain violent movement that would follow, while also respecting the sovereignty of the nation.

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