

The Commission of Inquiry on Burundi (COIB) was established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2016 to investigate the human rights violations arising from the political crisis sparked by the controversial decision of the then President Nkurunziza to run for a third term in the 2015 presidential election. On the occasion of the publication of its fifth report to the Council, the COIB asked relevant actors how they see the evolution in Burundi then and now.

1 “How has the country evolved since the 2015 crisis?”

“Despite some improvements since the 2020 elections, the human rights situation in Burundi has not changed - it remains fragile and volatile. All the structural issues identified since 2015 remain in place. In recent months, there has been an increase in arbitrary arrests of political opponents, cases of torture, enforced disappearances and targeted killings, apparently reversing initial progress made in 2020. Serious violations, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity, continue. Impunity remains widespread, particularly relating to the grave crimes committed in 2015 and 2016. Even if some Human Rights Defenders have been released, national and international human rights NGOs are still unable to operate in the country.”

Defend Defenders
(Nicolas Agostini)



“I am a refugee and have been living in exile since the beginning of 2016. Right before 2015, I had a good job and I was supporting my family without any problem whatsoever. In 2015, I went through the most horrific time of all my life but, thanks to the assistance I received in exile, I was able to bounce back and regain my self-confidence by talking about all that I went through in my home country, Burundi, before fleeing for fear of being executed by my torturers. I was then able to educate other refugees, victims and survivors of sexual violence, especially girls and women, on the importance of speaking and joining counselling groups, so as not to remain isolated. I am afraid that sexual violence, torture and enforced disappearances will continue behind closed doors against opponents of the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, and members of the Tutsi ethnic group.”

Burundian



“Before 2015, we had no problems. Our problems started in 2015 with my husband [...]. He was hunted down until he had to flee the country. Unfortunately, our family was also forced to flee. Sadly, fleeing did not solve all our problems. We are considered political opponents because we fled [...] but the harassment continues even here. Today, we are refugees without means. Our children do not go to school because we cannot afford it. We depend on UNHCR to survive. Our children are also traumatized with everything that has happened. When they see the police, they get scared and go into hiding because they are afraid of being arrested. It is difficult to see what the future holds.”

Burundian



“Although Burundi seems to be more stable, there are still outstanding issues that need to be addressed. On the one hand, the Government created a National Observatory of Prevention and Eradication of Genocide, war crimes and other crimes against humanity in a positive and institutional approach towards applying the "Framework of Analysis". On the other, the country remains fragile with concerning political and security tensions that point to existing risk factors of atrocity crimes such as growing perception of ethnic exclusion, a controversial truth and reconciliation process, armed clashes between security forces and unidentified armed groups as well as violent attacks against civilians by security forces based on ethnicity or political affiliation. There is also continued impunity for human rights violations.”

UN Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide

(Ms Alice Warimu Nderitu)



2 “Today, is there a need for continued independent international monitoring?”

“Continued international scrutiny and substantive work towards justice and accountability constitute the best chance to achieve meaningful change in the country. The Burundian authorities have given no indication that they intend to change course and address existing human rights challenges, nor have they taken meaningful steps in this regard.

The COIB has played, and continues to play, a vital role. It has documented violations and abuses and continues to shed a light on the situation in Burundi. It has also played the role of a deterrent - in particular as in 2015-2016, hate speech with ethnic overtones was developing. Officials and politicians who incited ethnic hatred stopped, probably after realizing that their behavior was being monitored by international actors and experts such as the COIB. This preventative dimension of the work of the COIB is as important as its investigative work.”

Defend Defenders
(Nicolas Agostini)



“There is a need for continued independent monitoring for a number of reasons:

- 1 There is no genuine human rights progress and impunity for atrocity crimes persists. Most of the promised reform initiatives under Ndayishimiye remain unfulfilled.
- 2 International attention - including maximum pressure on the government - has decreased since the new administration came into power. The COIB is vital in keeping Burundi high on the agenda in Geneva and beyond, giving visibility to lack of progress in human rights and atrocity prevention measures.
- 3 Widespread impunity remains an issue in Burundi. Addressing and ensuring an accurate historic record of past atrocities is essential to build resilience, address grievances, ensure justice for victims and prevent recurrence of atrocities.
- 4 As most of the atrocity risk factors remain in place, the COIB performs an essential early warning function. Its recommendations should be used as a forward-looking assessment on necessary change in Burundi.”

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
(Elisabeth Pramendorfer)



3 “How useful is the assessment of the risk of atrocity crimes prepared by the COIB on the basis of the ‘Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes’¹”?

“The analysis has proven to be a great tool in pulling out the risk factors of atrocity crimes facing Burundi. It is a practical and very effective way to get a sense of challenges facing the country and the areas to be prioritized by different stakeholders to help address those challenges. The risk factors of yesterday might not be the same as today, and it is essential that we understand this evolving situation for effective prevention.”

UN Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide
(Ms Alice Warimu Nderitu)



“The COIB has played an indispensable role in shedding light on the human rights and atrocity crisis in Burundi - and most importantly, it has performed an essential early warning function to highlight the heightened risk of atrocity crimes in the country. The 2019 report by the COIB is an “early warning” tool *par excellence*. By utilizing the “Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes”, not only did the COIB point to a potential trigger factor (elections), which may lead to renewed atrocity crimes. It also outlined all structural risk factors that have facilitated the commission of atrocities in the past, and which, if not addressed, will continue to pose a risk in the future.

Despite a new leadership in Burundi, and elections not resulting in [a] bloodbath (while taking place in a highly repressive environment), all of the risk factors the COIB has outlined remain in place today - without meaningful and system-wide reform, Burundians remain at risk of atrocities.”

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
(Elisabeth Pramendorfer)



¹ The Framework was developed by the UN Office of the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect.

4 “What are today’s urgent priority areas for action in Burundi?”

“Continued scrutiny; fight against impunity; justice and reparations; civic space.”

Defend Defenders
(Nicolas Agostini)



“Priority for structural prevention of atrocity crimes:

Victim-centered accountability processes. Genuine, credible and transparent investigations into past and ongoing atrocities; judicial proceedings for alleged perpetrators; and truth and reconciliation processes. Accountability will serve different purposes: truth and justice for victims; address root causes of atrocities; and at the same time, by holding perpetrators to account, “reform” the system (as most perpetrators remain in power/within the system).

Priority for imminent measures to be taken:

Immediately end human rights violations and abuses - including torture and killings. Give access to the COIB and other UN mechanisms.”

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
(Elisabeth Pramendorfer)



“There is the need to encourage the new government in Burundi to deepen democratic governance, strengthen the rule of law, address impunity through accountability measures and promote transparency in the reconciliation process. The analysis thus needs to continue, pointing at the much-needed prevention efforts from addressing triggering factors to supporting mitigating efforts.”

UN Special Advisor for
the Prevention of Genocide
(Ms Alice Warimu Nderitu)



Bulletin

“BURUNDI - THEN AND NOW”



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON BURUNDI

“In 2015 the crisis peaked because what was happening on the ground was not known to the outside world. Everyone's life, including mine, was quite uncertain. But when the outside world became aware of the crimes, my situation and that of many others improved because there was scrutiny on what was going on. For people like me who were ordered not to share information about the killings, the fact that the Commission of Inquiry talked about them was important. This allowed the international community to know what was going on in the country.

If international monitoring were to stop, Burundians would be the ones to lose out the most because the situation would deteriorate if the government knows that the crimes committed would no longer be reported to the outside world. The authorities are concerned that what is happening will be reported outside and hence there is some form of restraint, but imagine what will happen when there are no more people like you to keep an eye on the situation.”

Burundian




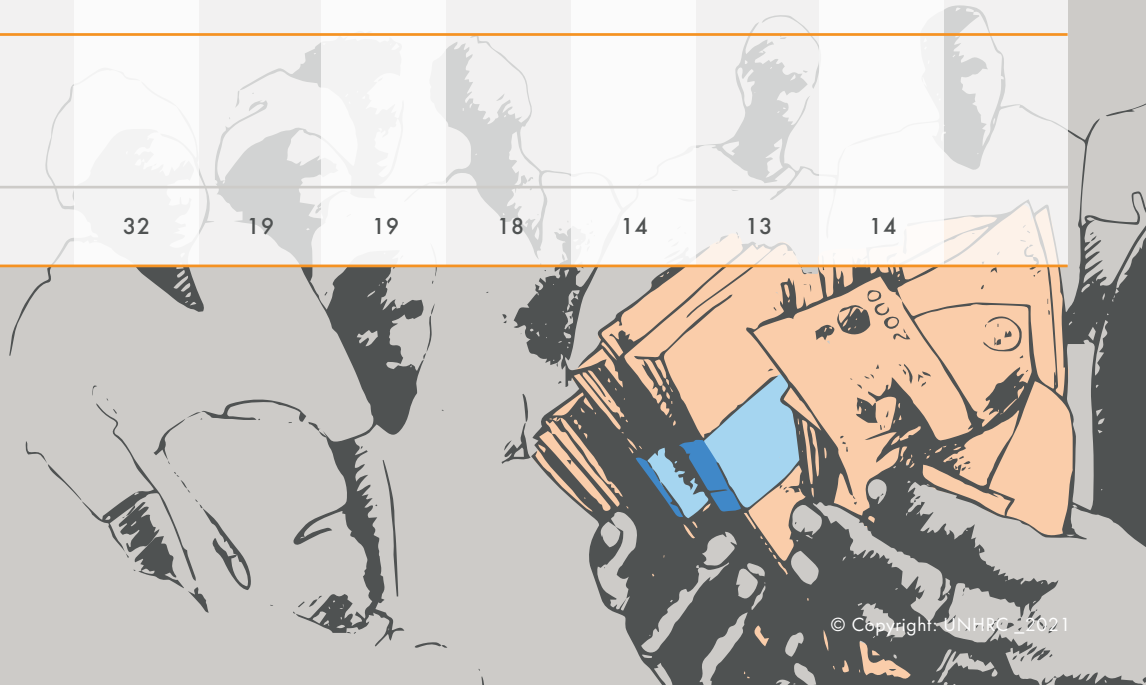
“On its own, Burundi cannot guarantee a satisfactory human rights situation through its own mechanisms, namely the National Independent Human Rights Commission. It is not yet time to leave Burundi as it is not like other countries which are more advanced on the human rights front.”

Burundian



5 Key facts about Burundi, then and now

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
The Economist Democracy Index 									
Score out of 10	3.41	3.33	2.49	2.40	2.33	2.33	2.15	2.14	
Transparency International Corruption Index 									
Score out of 100 (the higher the score, the greater the perception that the country is free from corruption)	21	20	21	20	22	17	19	19	
Rank among 180 countries	157	159	150	159	157	170	165	165	
Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index 									
Rank among 180 countries	132	142	145	156	160	159	159	160	147
Freedom House Civil Liberties Index 									
Score out of 100		32	19	19	18	14	13	14	



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	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2010 - 2019
Ibrahim Index of African Governance (scores out of 100) 											
Security & rule of law	42.9	42.8	42.3	39.9	39.3	29.9	29.2	30.7	29.7	30.2	-12.7
Participation, rights & inclusion	44.2	44.1	44.8	44.1	43.4	39.2	36.2	35.2	34.0	33.2	-11.0
Foundations for economic opportunity	34.0	35.2	36.8	38.5	36.9	36.6	36.4	36.5	35.7	37.0	+3.0
Human development	40.9	41.7	44.3	45.2	47.4	46.9	46.9	46.5	46.2	47.2	+6.3

