



Plenary sitting

B9-0061/2020

14.1.2020

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 144 of the Rules of Procedure

on Burundi, notably freedom of expression
(2020/2502(RSP))

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on behalf of the PPE Group

B9-0061/2020

European Parliament resolution on Burundi, notably freedom of expression (2020/2503(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Burundi,
 - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
 - having regard to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights,
 - having regard to the Partnership Agreement between the Members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part (the Cotonou Agreement), and the human rights clauses contained therein, in particular Article 9,
 - having regard to the statement made by the European Union Spokesperson on the situation in Burundi on 14 December 2018,
 - having regards to the statement made on 8 May 2018 by the High Representative on behalf of the EU, Federica Mogherini, on the situation in Burundi ahead of the constitutional referendum,
 - having regard to the statement ahead of the 2020 Burundian elections made on 19 February 2019 by Antoine Michon, Security Council Deputy Coordinator for the permanent mission of France to the United Nations,
 - having regard to the 2019 Report by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi,
 - having regard to Rule 144 of its Rule of Procedure,
- A. whereas Burundi has been facing a political, human rights and humanitarian crisis since April 2015, and the situation remains extremely worrisome;
- B. whereas Burundi's security services and members of the Imbonerakure, the ruling party youth league, allegedly has carried out widespread human rights abuses in the past years, including summary executions, rapes, abductions, beatings, and intimidation of suspected political opponents;
- C. whereas private media and journalists have been directly targeted in many of those incidents; whereas freedom of expression has been steadily deteriorating since the start of the crisis in 2015; whereas Burundi ranks 159 out of 180 countries in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, compiled by the Reporters without Borders;

- D. whereas most independent radios remain closed to this day, dozens of journalists are still unable to return from self-imposed exile, and those who remain find it hard to work freely because of harassment by the security forces, which are encouraged by an official discourse associating non-aligned media with enemies of the nation;
- E. whereas, in October 2019, four journalists and a driver from the privately-owned news outlet *Iwacu* were arrested as they were trying to cover unrest in the country; whereas, the four journalists were charged with endangering state security and Burundi prosecutors sought 15-year jail terms and furthermore demanded for the detained to be denied their civic rights for 20 years;
- F. whereas, amongst the most notable recent incidents is the disappearance of Jean Bigirimana, journalist at *Iwacu*, on 22 July 2016; whereas, three years after the events, the questions surrounding the disappearance of Jean Bigirimana remain unanswered and his family remains without closure;
- G. whereas Jean Anastase Hicuburund, a senior election official, has called for independent media to be barred from covering the presidential polls in 2020, and urged for official steps to be taken to “*block the way for those media who do not want to follow the path taken by the government*”;
- H. whereas the Burundian government has ignored the reports on human rights breaches and has qualified many incidents as “*fake news*”, arguing they are inventions of the international community, notably the EU and the UN Human Rights Council; whereas in 2018 the Burundian Government ordered the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Burundi to close its office;
- I. whereas, since October 2017, Burundi has withdrawn from the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court; whereas despite the call from the international community to launch a procedure to re-enter the Rome statute, no action has been taken by the Burundian government;
- J. whereas, since 2015, the political and humanitarian crisis has led to the displacement of thousands; whereas the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as a result of conflict has continued to grow in 2018, with 49 000 new cases since 31 December 2018; whereas the issue of IDPs as a result of the 2015 political and humanitarian crisis in Burundi are subject to risks of conflict with the local populations in the region;
- K. whereas the national indicative programme 2014-2020 under the 11th European Development Fund has set aside €432 million for Burundi and outlined Support for Sustainable Rural Development for Nutrition, health and energy among the main focal sectors of the EU cooperation with the country
- L. whereas Burundi will hold presidential elections in 2020; whereas President Pierre Nkurunziza, who has been in office since August 2005, has committed not to run in the upcoming presidential elections of 2020;
- M. whereas, on 24 October 2019, the Council adopted a decision to extend the existing sanctions and restrictive measures on Burundi until 31 October 2020;

1. Expresses its concern about the current political and humanitarian rights situation in Burundi; strongly condemns any kind of violence against journalists, human rights defenders and civil society;
2. Deeply regrets the drastic worsening of freedom of expression since 2015 and the current state of media freedom in the country; demands the government of Burundi to immediately and unconditionally release all journalists, human rights defenders, political opposition leaders and other protesters currently in detention without charge or trial and to allow those facing trial full access to legal representation;
3. Reiterates its commitment to freedom of expression and reaffirms the key role played by the media, human rights organizations and civil society in a democratic society;
4. Calls on the Burundian government to uphold its commitments regarding freedom of expression, and to respect the individual rights of journalists working in the country; urges the Burundian government to take urgent measures to ensure that media freedom is respected, and to guarantee the safety of journalists and human rights defenders covering events in the country;
5. Urges the Burundian government to allow civil society to work freely, which is also demanded in the ongoing negotiations for the Post-Cotonou Agreement;
6. Calls on the Burundian authorities to conduct a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into all human rights breaches, including by police and state officials, and duly hold accountable those responsible; urges the Burundian authorities to launch an investigation into the disappearance of Jean Bigirimana; calls on the Burundian authorities to drop charges and immediately and unconditionally release the four journalists who were arrested in October 2019;
7. Urges the Burundian government to reopen the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights;
8. Welcomes President Pierre Nkurunziza's commitment not to run in the upcoming presidential elections of 2020; calls on the Burundian government to uphold his commitment to hold free and democratic elections in 2020;
9. Deeply regrets that no action has been taken to re-enter the Rome Statute; urges the Burundian government to start such a procedure immediately;
10. Reaffirms its support to the EU's decision to extend the restrictive measures against the Burundian government until October 2020;
11. Notes with great concern the growing amount of IDPs from Burundi and neighbouring countries; calls on the EU to step up funding and other humanitarian efforts for Burundians who are internally displaced or refugees;

12. Calls on the European Union to pursue its humanitarian and development efforts in the country, as well as to make full use of its external instruments to promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in Burundi; calls on the EU and the international community as a whole to continue to promote and make use of political dialogue in the entire region to avoid further tensions and instability;
13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European External Action Service, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Government and Parliament of Burundi, the African Union, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, and the Pan-African Parliament.