Geneva International Centre for Justice

63rd Session of the Human Rights Council

BURUNDI'S 2027 ELECTIONS: ACT BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE



By Shirley Victorio / GICJ

September 2026

Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary....3
II. Background....5
III. Summary of the Special Rapporteur's Report....6
IV. Exhaustive Summary of the Interactive Dialogue....10
1. Opening Remarks by the Special Rapporteur....10
2. Statement by the Republic of Burundi as the Country Concerned....11
Independent National Human Rights Commission of Burundi....12
3. Statements on Behalf of Groups of States....13
The European Union (EU)....13
The Kingdom of Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic States....14
The Kingdom of Belgium on behalf of the Benelux Countries....15
4. Relevant Statements by Other Delegations....16
The Democratic Republic of the Congo....16
The Republic of Rwanda....17
The United Republic of Tanzania....18
The Republic of Kenya....19
The Republic of Ireland....20
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland....21
States emphasising sovereignty, dialogue and technical cooperation....21
Right of Reply: the Republic of Rwanda....23
5. Statements by Civil Society Organisations....23
6. Concluding Remarks by the Special Rapporteur....25
V. Position of the Geneva International Centre for Justice....27
VI. References....29

I. Executive Summary

On 18 September 2026, during the 18th meeting of the 63rd session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), an Interactive Dialogue (ID) was held with Mr Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, Special Rapporteur (SR) on the situation of human rights in Burundi, under Item 4 on human rights situations that require the Council's attention. Presenting his report (A/HRC/63/59) under the call to "act before it's too late", the SR focused on the risk of an electoral crisis ahead of the presidential election scheduled for May 2027. He identified four warning signs: severe restrictions on political pluralism; obstacles to genuine competition, including prohibitive candidacy fees and a two-year waiting period for party leavers to run as independents; a coercive environment of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and arbitrary detention, with the Imbonerakure, the ruling party's youth league, playing a growing paramilitary-like role; and the recurrence of the same pattern of exclusion, intimidation, violence and impunity before the 2015, 2020 and 2025 elections. He added that the closing of civic space and the economic crisis compound these risks, and that his report had been drafted without any cooperation from the Government of Burundi.

The Republic of Burundi, as the country concerned, rejected the mandate as a "targeted witch hunt" driven by Western powers and the European Union (EU), described the 2025 legislative elections as regular and peaceful, and blamed the Resistance for a State of Law in Burundi (RED-Tabara), an armed resistance group, allegedly supported by the Republic of Rwanda, for insecurity. The Independent National Human Rights Commission of Burundi presented data on investigations into abuses by public officials and on illegal detention, and drew attention to the humanitarian pressures created by refugee flows. The EU, the Nordic-Baltic states and the Benelux countries expressed deep concern at enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, sexual and gender-based violence, and the shrinking of civic and political space, and called on Burundi to grant the SR access, to reopen the country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and to combat impunity.

Twenty-one states took the floor in addition to the three group statements. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Russian Federation, and the People's Republic of China commended Burundi's efforts, and a large number of African, Asian and Latin American emphasised sovereignty and non-interference and opposed country-specific mandates adopted

without the consent of the State concerned. The Republic of South Sudan went further and urged the Council to reassess Burundi's consideration under Item 4 with a view to ending the mandate. Tanzania rejected the report's findings on the treatment of Burundian refugees, while Rwanda exercised its right of reply to refute accusations made by Burundi and the Congo. By contrast, Greece, Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland echoed the SR's concerns. Greece urged Burundi to set up an independent mechanism for identifying and preserving evidence of human rights abuses, while Ireland and the United Kingdom asked how the international community could support credible, inclusive and peaceful elections in 2027.

Civil Society Organisations (CSO) stressed that the crisis of 2015 and 2016 that led to Burundi's inclusion on the Council's agenda remains unsolved, documented sharp rise in cases of torture, arbitrary detention and violations of the right to life in 2026, warned against forced returns of Burundian refugees and the transnational repression of exiles, and called on the Council to renew the mandate. In his concluding remarks, the SR grouped the questions into three themes: justice and cooperation, the 2027 elections, and vulnerable groups. He recommended the preservation of independent documentation for use before regional and international bodies, the use of extraterritorial jurisdiction, early deployment of independent electoral observers, support to civil society and to media in exile, and preventive monitoring before the elections rather than after them.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) is particularly concerned that the conditions necessary for free and credible presidential elections in 2027 are not in place, and that the climate of impunity surrounding extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and the conduct of the Imbonerakure continues unabated. GICJ stresses the urgent need for Burundi to cooperate with the SR and the OHCHR, and for the international community to act preventively before the human costs become irreversible.

II. Background

Burundi has faced recurring political and human rights crises since 2015, when the announcement that the then-President Pierre Nkurunziza would seek a further term triggered protests, an attempted coup and a wave of repression. In response, the HRC established a Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, which found that serious violations, including acts that may amount to crimes against humanity, persisted through 2017 and 2018. Those included summary executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and ill-treatment, sexual violence and violations of civil liberties. The Commission identified the National Intelligence Service and the police as the State entities most frequently implicated, and expressed concern at the growing role of the Imbonerakure (A/HRC/39/63).

After the Commission of Inquiry concluded its work, the Council established the mandate of a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi in October 2021. The mandate is held by Mr Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, a magistrate from Burkina Faso. The Council has extended the mandate annually, most recently for one year by resolution 60/15 of 6 October 2025. The Government of Burundi has not cooperated with the mandate: the SR has been denied access to the country and, as noted again during this ID, the OHCHR country office remains closed. Burundi has consistently described the mandate as politically motivated.

The dialogue took place in a tense pre-electoral context. The ruling party, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), won 96.5 per cent of the votes and all 100 seats in the National Assembly in the 2025 legislative elections, and presidential elections are due in May 2027. Economic conditions have deteriorated sharply: according to the SR, the consumer price index rose by 143 per cent over four years and the Burundian franc has lost more than 87 per cent of its value against the US Dollar since 2015. Regionally, the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the activities of the RED-Tabara armed group, the arrival of Congolese refugees in Burundi and the return of Burundian refugees from the United Republic of Tanzania have added to security and humanitarian pressures.

It was against this backdrop that the ID of 18 September was convened to consider the SR’s latest report.

III. Summary of the Special Rapporteur's Report

The report of the SR on the situation of human rights in Burundi (A/HRC/63/59) was submitted pursuant to HRC resolution 60/15 of 6 October 2025, by which the Council extended the mandate for one year. It covers the period from July 2025 to June 2026 and examines the situation at a critical moment for the country, marked by the concentration of power, the persistent closing of civic and political space and the weakness of the institutions responsible for protecting human rights ahead of the 2027 presidential election. Relying on the standard of "reasonable grounds to believe", the SR regrets that the Burundian authorities continue to refuse any substantive cooperation with the mandate and reiterates his availability for constructive dialogue.

In the national context, the report recalls that the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, won 96.5 per cent of the votes and every seat in the National Assembly in the legislative elections of 5 June 2025, with no other party crossing the 2 per cent threshold. The Constitutional Court upheld the results and dismissed the opposition's allegations of fraud. The SR observes that the National Independent Human Rights Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission remain subject to serious political interference, and that the judiciary remains largely subordinated to the executive, with acquitted persons kept in detention while members of the security forces implicated in violations are released. He also notes the circulation of weapons and fighters in the border areas with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including from the M23 and RED-Tabara, and the risk posed by the Ebola outbreak in that country.

Regarding civil and political rights, the SR remains gravely concerned by summary or extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment, principally attributed to agents of the National Intelligence Service, the police and the Imbonerakure, described by several sources as acting in a paramilitary manner. Citing the Burundian League of Human Rights (ITEKA), the report states that at least 402 people were killed in 2025, including over 110 summary or extrajudicial executions by the Imbonerakure, and that 182 people were killed in the first six months of 2026. ITEKA also recorded 55 enforced disappearances in 2025 and 25 in the first half of 2026. The report describes torture as an instrument of political repression and extortion, notably in unofficial detention centres, and highlights the persistent denial of such practices by the authorities. On arbitrary detention, it

cites 245 arbitrary arrests followed by unlawful detention between July and December 2025, prisons designed for around 4,000 inmates that hold several times that number, unfulfilled commitments made before the Committee against Torture in 2023 and to the "Human Rights 75" initiative on decongesting prisons. On freedom of expression, the SR notes that Burundi rose from 125th to 119th place in the 2026 Reporters Without Borders index after the release of three journalists, but that this masks continuing surveillance, widespread self-censorship and mounting pressure on the independent newspaper Iwacu.

Turning to participation in public affairs, and recalling Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the report notes that the presidential election will take place on 3 May 2027 and that President Évariste Ndayishimiye was designated as the CNDD-FDD candidate on 26 April 2026. The SR identifies four risk factors: a marked restriction of political pluralism, including the ousting and barring of opposition leader Agathon Rwasa and the withdrawal of five parties from the Independent National Electoral Commission's meetings in May 2026; legal and institutional obstacles, notably the registration fee of 100 million Burundian francs (about 34,700 United States dollar) introduced by the April 2024 Electoral Code and a two-year waiting period for those who leave a party, which he considers disproportionate under Article 25; a coercive security environment in which the Imbonerakure are increasingly comparable to a paramilitary organisation; and the reproduction of the pre- and post-electoral violence observed in 2015 and 2020, amid structural impunity. Aggravating factors include the acute economic crisis, forced contributions to the party and restrictions on civic and media space. The report adds that the most sensitive periods are likely to be candidate registration and the weeks following the announcement of results, and refers to an estimate by the Kofi Annan Foundation of a probability of election-related violence above 98 per cent.

On economic and social rights, the SR stresses that they cannot be examined separately from the political environment. He cites multidimensional poverty affecting 75.1 per cent of the population, a gap of about 100 per cent between official and parallel exchange rates, chronic fuel and electricity shortages, and a cumulative rise in consumer prices of around 143 per cent over 2022 to 2025, with a currency that has lost 87.7 per cent of its value against the dollar since 2015. He warns that the conflict in the Middle East since 28 February 2026 could aggravate these vulnerabilities through higher fuel and fertiliser prices. The report also documents acute food insecurity, chronic child malnutrition with 56 per cent of children

under five stunted, a cholera outbreak with 1,238 cases by 7 June 2026, and mixed record on education, where enrolment gains have not been matched by learning quality. Under the right to development, the SR expresses concern at urban modernisation measures obliging residents to pay for paving on pain of heavy fines, at reports that residents in Buhumuza province were warned of possible imprisonment, and at a reported announcement that couples must own a brick house before marrying.

The report gives particular attention to specific groups. It reports persistent gender-based violence, including sexual violence, femicide and infanticide, citing ITEKA's figures of 156 victims of gender-based violence in 2025 and 75 in the first half of 2026, and highlights the heightened vulnerability of displaced, refugee and returnee women and girls. It expresses concern at reports that children have been recruited or mobilised in schools and community gatherings by local structures of the ruling party for surveillance, intimidation and, in some cases, violence linked to the Imbonerakure. On refugees (paragraph 62 to 68), the SR notes that repatriations from the United Republic of Tanzania have accelerated sharply since late 2025 under an updated tripartite agreement setting a target of 3,000 returns per week, that more than 28,000 people returned in the first two months of 2026 and that Nduta camp was closed in early May 2026. While acknowledging that the UNHCR facilitates the returns and describes them as voluntary, he reports concordant information of a coercive environment, including shelter demolitions, reports of torture and ill-treatment, movement restrictions, closures of schools and health centres, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances. He raises serious concerns under the principle of non-refoulement, is particularly worried about some 17,000 refugees who say they cannot return, and calls on donors not to let humanitarian underfunding become a factor of refoulement.

The SR concludes that the human rights situation remains gravely concerning and that the risk of new violations ahead of 2027 is high. He recommends, among other measures, that the Government cooperate fully with the mandate and allow the reopening of the OHCHR country office; end summary and extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture and arbitrary detention and prosecute those responsible; establish an independent mechanism for exhumation, identification and preservation of evidence; demilitarise and demobilise the Imbonerakure; guarantee judicial independence; revise the restrictive provisions of the 2024 Electoral Code and guarantee the independence of the electoral commission; reopen civic and media space before the 2027 pre-electoral period; and identify, demobilise and reintegrate

children associated with political or security structures. He recommends that Tanzania, UNHCR and other actors ensure strictly voluntary, safe and dignified returns based on individual screening, suspend numerical targets and closure timetables, and set up an independent documentation mechanism, and to follow up on the referral to the International Criminal Court. He also recommends that the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions conduct a special review of the accreditation of the National Independent Human Rights Commission, and that the Council urge Burundi to cooperate, press for the reopening of the OHCHR office and organise a high-level dialogue on Burundi, that includes the civil society, before 2027.

IV. Exhaustive Summary of the Interactive Dialogue

1. Opening Remarks by the Special Rapporteur

Mr Fortuné Gaetan Zongo presented his report, noting at the outset that it had been drafted without any cooperation from the Burundian Government. He drew the Council's attention to the presidential elections of May 2027 and warned that the precursors of an electoral crisis were already palpable. In his words, the window of prevention remains open but is closing swiftly.



Referring to Article 25 of the ICCPR, he set out the four warning signs identified in his report: restrictions on political pluralism, following the ruling party's win of 96.5 per cent of the votes and every seat in the National Assembly in the previous year; obstacles to real competition, including prohibitive fees and the waiting period for independent candidates; a coercive environment of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and arbitrary detention, with the growing power of the Imbonerakure a particular concern; and the recurrence of the same scheme of exclusion, intimidation, violence and impunity seen in earlier electoral cycles. He stated that nothing at this stage would lead to the conclusion that pre- and post-electoral violence would not be repeated.

The SR added that economic and social rights cannot be dissociated from the political context. Over four years the consumer price index had risen by 143 per cent and the Burundian franc had fallen by over 87 per cent against the dollar since 2015, and people who depend on the party in power for food, jobs or essential services are unlikely to vote freely. He welcomed the release of journalists as a sign that human rights situation can improve. He then reiterated his recommendations to the Government, including the reopening of the OHCHR country office and the acceptance of a long-term independent international electoral observation mission, describing cooperation as "neither a concession nor interference" but a tool for trust and prevention. He concluded that the risk factors are documented, the preventive measures are known, and what is lacking is political will, adding that prevention means protecting the right of every Burundian woman and man to choose their leaders freely.

2. Statement by the Republic of Burundi as the Country Concerned



The representative of the Republic of Burundi described the mandate, in place since 2015, as an evident manifestation of a targeted witch hunt and hegemonic interference by certain Western powers seeking to isolate and economically suffocate Burundi under the pretext of protecting human rights. She argued that keeping Burundi on the Council's agenda for twelve years at the initiative of the EU was a diplomatic weapon aimed at weakening republican institutions and imposing a governance model favourable to strategic interests, and claimed that the 2015 coup attempt had been tacitly authorised by those powers. She asked how the

Council could preserve its credibility if its mechanisms were used to impose disguised political sanctions, and whether the same norms would be applied equally to all states.

The delegate stated that the leadership of the RED-Tabara armed group operated from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in complicity with the AFC/M23 rebel coalition and with the logistical and military support of Rwanda, and asked when the Council would condemn the group for the terrorist acts that had killed civilians, including children. She said that the legislative elections held the previous year had been deemed regular by international observers and had seen a massive turnout in a peaceful climate, and claimed that the mandate shaped public opinion questioning the legitimacy of the upcoming elections and a consequence vilified the ruling party and its youth league, the Imbonerakure, whom she presented as patriots. She affirmed that Burundian refugees in Tanzania were returning massively and voluntarily under the tripartite agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and considered it absurd that the report questioned the voluntary nature of the returns. She ended by evoking Burundi's history of resistance to German colonial forces and stressed that Burundi would not bend.

Independent National Human Rights Commission of Burundi



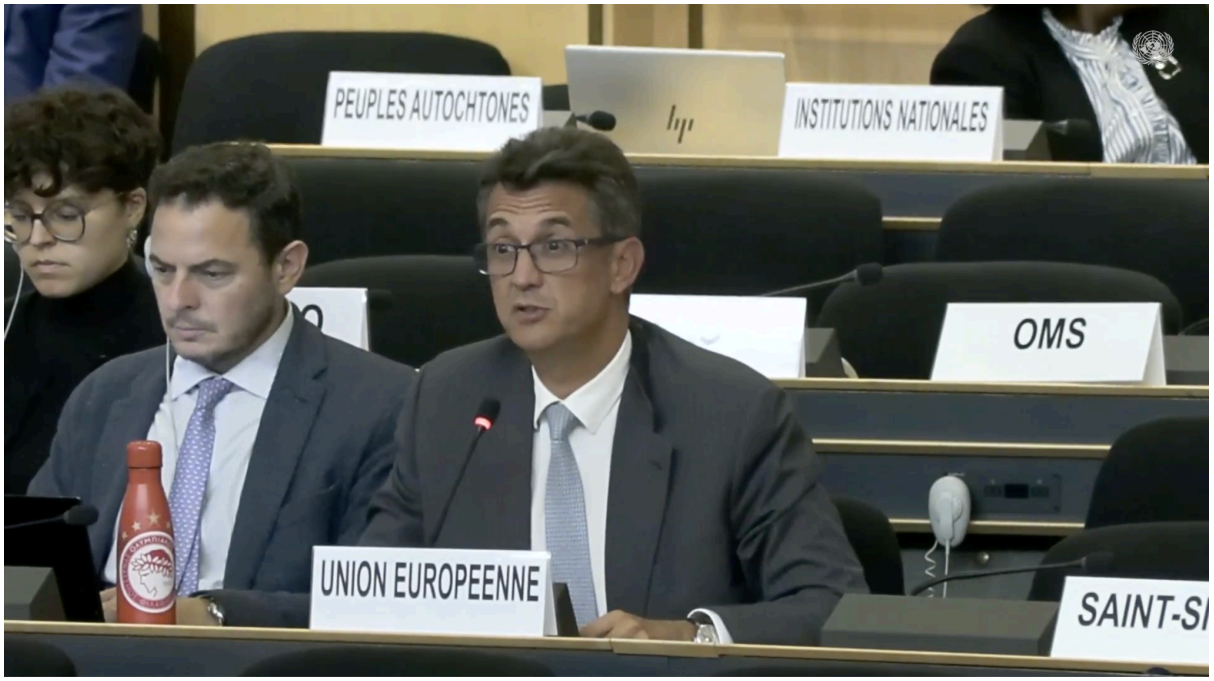
The Independent National Human Rights Commission congratulated the High Commissioner for Human Rights on his re-election and took note of the SR's report, encouraging him to consult the Commission's annual report for 2025–2026. It described a joint visit with

UNHCR and OHCHR to refugee camps and host communities for returnees, the resulting report of 4 September, and the challenges posed by the large number of Congolese refugees, the swift return of Burundians and cuts to the UNHCR budget, urging the Government to mobilise resources and foster partnerships for humanitarian assistance.

On impunity, the Commission reported that 148 police officers were facing criminal charges, some had been sentenced and six dismissed, and encouraged the State to continue acting against public officials, particularly members of uniformed services, who commit human rights abuses. It also reported on 27 cases of torture, 37 cases of abduction, some followed by enforced disappearance, and 223 cases of illegal detention, and stated that it would recommend that the Government take all measures to release detainees who had been acquitted, had completed their sentences, suffered from mental illness or had benefited from presidential pardons.

3. Statements on Behalf of Groups of States

The European Union (EU)



The representative of the EU thanked the SR for his report and expressed support for a mandate implemented in difficult conditions. He stated that the EU was profoundly concerned by the human rights situation and that, despite certain positive developments in recent years, violations and abuses remain numerous. With presidential elections approaching

in 2027, he was particularly troubled by growing restrictions on opposition parties, media, human rights defenders and civil society, and noted that the open and pluralist environment essential for free, inclusive and credible elections was lacking.

The speaker expressed concern at reports of summary or extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, sexual violence and restrictions on political actors, and urged the authorities to guarantee independent, impartial and effective investigations and to combat impunity. He encouraged Burundi to step up cooperation with UN mechanisms, especially the SR, and to guarantee access to the country. He reaffirmed its support for the Burundian people, pointing out that the EU is the largest contributor of official development assistance to the country.

The Kingdom of Norway on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic States



The representative of the Kingdom of Norway, speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic states, thanked the SR for his update and expressed deep concern over the fact that he continues to be denied access to the country. He called on the Government to grant him unhindered access and the information needed to fulfil his mandate, and to engage constructively with UN human rights mechanisms, including by reopening the OHCHR country office. The group said it was deeply alarmed by continued reports of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial

executions and widespread sexual and gender-based violence, and reiterated its concern at restrictions on civic and political space as Burundi approaches the 2027 elections. It urged the authorities to uphold their international human rights obligations and to prioritise a safe and open civic space throughout the electoral cycle. The group asked the SR which concrete measures the international community should take to support civil society and independent media ahead of the elections.

The Kingdom of Belgium on behalf of the Benelux Countries



The representative of the Kingdom of Belgium on behalf of the Benelux countries, supported the EU statement and regretted the lack of cooperation from the Burundian authorities, urging the Government to give UN mechanisms access to the territory and to take tangible steps towards reopening the OHCHR country office. It described the documented cases of torture, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and sexual and gender-based violence as troubling, and stated that combating impunity through credible, impartial and independent investigations should be a priority. Ahead of the 2027 elections, he called on the authorities to combat the resurgence of hate speech and incitement to violence, to guarantee political pluralism, to address obstacles to participation in the elections and to lift restrictions on civic space, particularly for civil society, human rights defenders and journalists. It asked the SR which actions should be prioritised to guarantee effective access to justice for survivors.

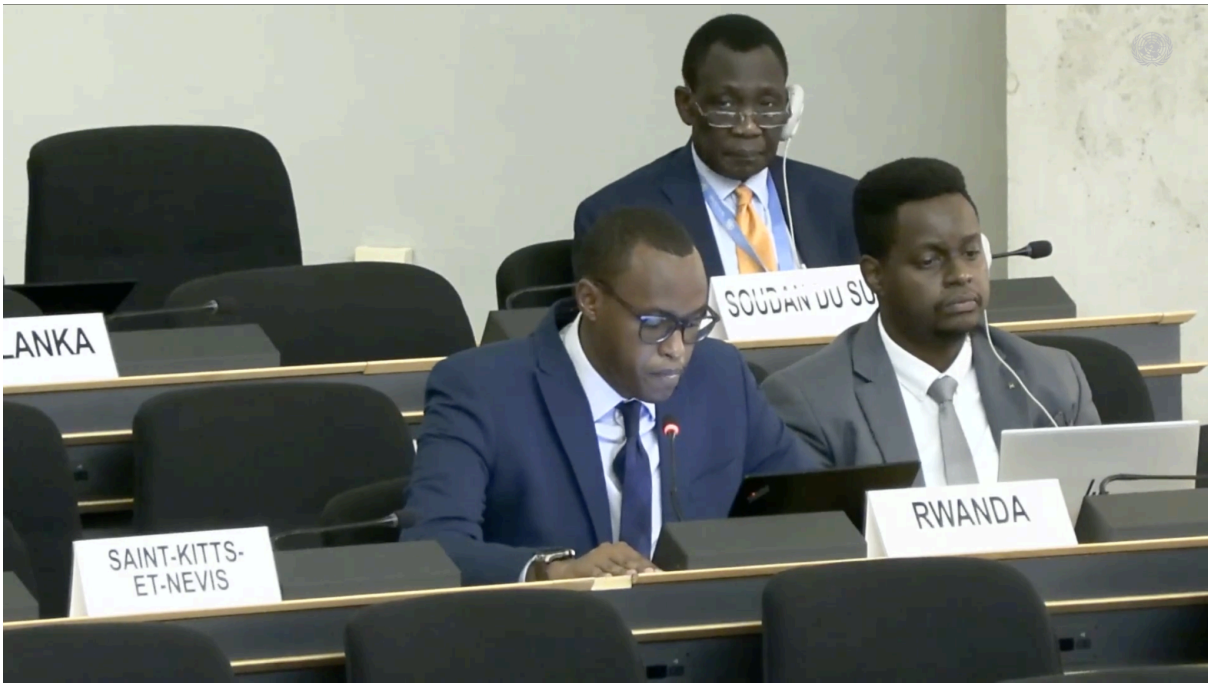
4. Relevant Statements by Other Delegations

The Democratic Republic of the Congo



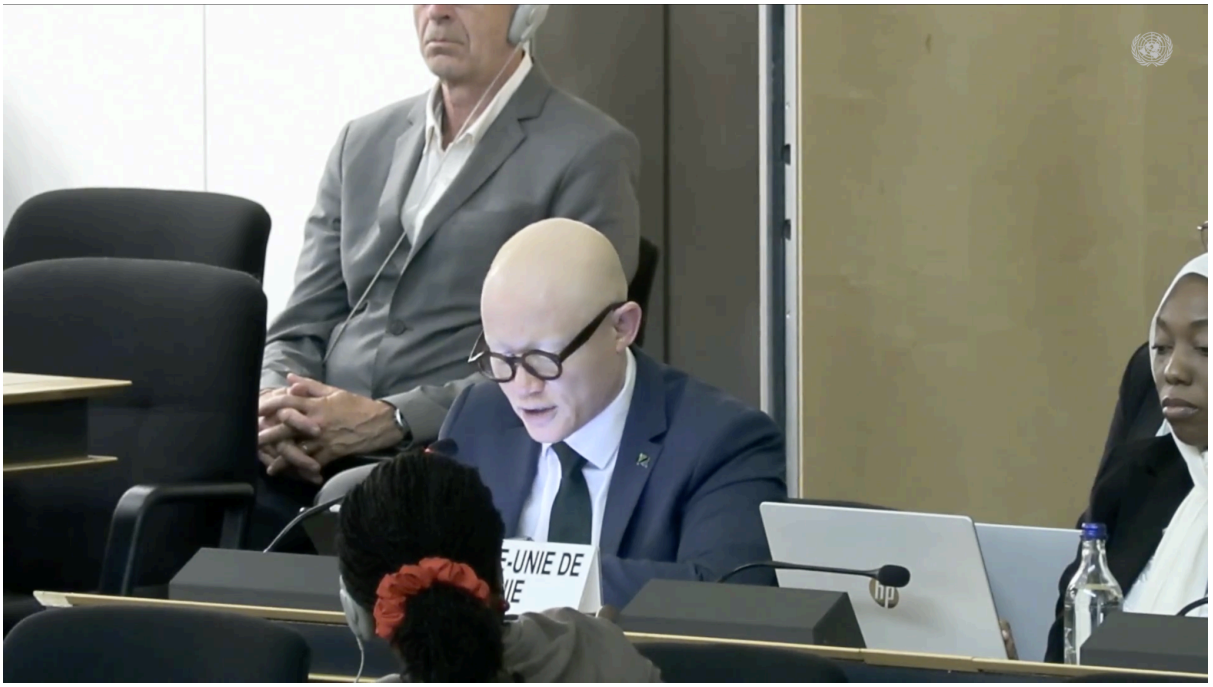
The speaker for the Democratic Republic of the Congo commended what he described as Burundi's progress in the field of human rights despite a complex socio-economic context, citing the exercise of its mandate by the National Independent Human Rights Commission, rising school enrolment, extending health coverage and successful repatriations. He welcomed the joint declaration signed on 15 May by 32 political parties, which he saw as a strong commitment to a transparent, democratic and peaceful electoral process, and encouraged the Government to pursue reforms consolidating the rule of law and judicial independence. In his view, progress is better achieved through dialogue and technical cooperation, especially through the Universal Periodic Review. He thanked Burundi for hosting Congolese refugees and called on the international community to help Burundi face what he described as aggression carried out by Rwanda.

The Republic of Rwanda



The representative of the Republic of Rwanda thanked the SR and encouraged Burundi to engage constructively with human rights mechanisms. He stated that peace, security and respect for human rights in Burundi matter to the stability of the Great Lakes region, and that regional concerns should be addressed through dialogue based on facts and in a spirit of good neighbourliness. The speaker announced that he would come back to what he called the unfounded allegations made by the country concerned (see the right of reply below).

The United Republic of Tanzania



The representative of the United Republic of Tanzania took note of the report but said he was concerned by the allegations, conclusions and related recommendations concerning Tanzania in paragraphs 62 to 68, which he did not accept. He argued that serious allegations should not be presented as established facts without a sufficiently balanced and verified basis, and strongly rejected the allegations of enforced disappearances of Burundian refugees. The speaker stressed that repatriations are conducted within the tripartite framework of Tanzania, Burundi and UNHCR, guided by voluntariness, safety and dignity, and observed that the report itself acknowledges that UNHCR facilitates the returns and describes them as voluntary. He recalled that the Burundian refugee situation in Tanzania has lasted for decades while receiving declining international attention and support, considered it misleading to construe camp consolidation or closure as coercion, and called for objective and balanced reporting, constructive engagement and dedicated international resources for refugee protection, durable solutions and sustainable integration.

The Republic of Kenya



The representative of the Republic of Kenya, speaking as a member of the East African Community, said she follows developments in "our sister country" closely. She encouraged continued engagement and dialogue while recognising efforts to strengthen national institutions, and underlined the importance of access to justice and the enjoyment of freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly as Burundi prepares for the 2027 electoral period. She pointed to regional tools, namely the early warning systems of the East African Community and the African Union's Panel of the Wise, as instruments that could help prevent tensions and support a peaceful and inclusive political process.

The Republic of Ireland



The representative of Ireland, aligning itself with the EU, was deeply concerned by reports of extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests, principally attributed to members of the National Intelligence Service, the police and the Imbonerakure, and echoed the SR's concern at the persistence of sexual and gender-based violence. She urged full investigation and accountability, expressed concern at the repression of civil society, human rights defenders, journalists and political opponents, and called on the Government to ensure the conditions for credible, inclusive and transparent elections by upholding freedoms of association, assembly, opinion and expression. The speaker called on Burundi to engage meaningfully with the SR, to grant access and to reopen the OHCHR country office, and asked how the international community could support the organisation to ensure transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections, given the risk of conflict in the electoral period.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland



The representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland noted the SR's findings were concerning, citing extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, restrictions on fundamental freedoms and shrinking civic and political space ahead of the 2027 election, and called on Burundi to protect the right of all citizens to participate freely and peacefully in public life. She encouraged Burundi to continue supporting the safe return of Burundian refugees and asylum seekers in accordance with international law, and thanked Burundi for hosting refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for assisting to ensure that any returns are voluntary, safe and dignified. The speaker also raised the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, commending Burundi's prompt work on surveillance and preparedness and emphasising the importance of protecting human rights during public health responses. She asked the SR what practical steps the international community could take to support conditions for a credible and inclusive presidential election.

The Russian Federation



The representative of the Russian Federation noted the work of institutions such as the National Council for National Unity and Reconciliation, the National Independent Human Rights Commission, the ombudsman and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, welcomed measures against discrimination towards religious minorities, gender and minority quotas and dialogue with opposition and civil society, and urged the international community to refrain from exerting pressure on the pretext of human rights.

Right of Reply: the Republic of Rwanda

At the end of the meeting, the representative of the Republic of Rwanda exercised its right of reply to refute what it called unfounded allegations made against it by Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It argued that statements before the Council should be supported by verifiable facts, and that Burundi is itself a direct military actor in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, with forces deployed in South Kivu operating alongside the Congolese armed forces, the FDLR and the Wazalendo militia, citing independent reporting. Rwanda warned against attempts to deflect responsibility for the security and human rights situation in the region, urged Burundi to address human rights concerns within its own jurisdiction, and called on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to contribute constructively to the implementation of existing peace commitments, including the Washington framework.

5. Statements by Civil Society Organisations

Civil Society Organisations (CSO) supported the SR's work and warned that the human rights situation is deteriorating as the presidential election approaches. Several recalled that the Council had put Burundi on its agenda following the crimes committed in 2015 and 2016, that no structural reforms have been undertaken since the Commission of Inquiry handed over to the SR in 2021, and that the recent enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings recall those earlier crimes. They warned that the ruling party is seeking to cordon off civic space and dismantle the Arusha Agreement, and that the risk of violations and atrocities is therefore growing.

Organisations documented a marked increase in violations in 2026. According to data presented, 216 cases were recorded in the first eight months of the year, against 180 during the whole of the previous year, with attacks on the right to life rising from 88 to 106 and arbitrary detentions almost trebling from 32 to 90. Another organisation reported 216 violations since January 2026, including 76 violations of women's and children's rights since April, and denounced the practice of hasty burials of victims without inquiry, which compromises evidence collection and denies access to justice. Speakers pointed to enforced disappearances and summary executions targeting opposition figures and former military officers, to political arrests, and to the fact that people who have been acquitted or have served their sentences remain in prison.

CSO also highlighted the growing security role of the Imbonerakure, whose integration into reserve forces was described as adding to repression, and the risk that the armed conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and RED-Tabara's activities pose to peaceful elections. Organisations expressed alarm at the forced return of Burundian refugees from Tanzania, some of whom fear renewed persecution, at the situation of Burundian nationals in Kenya following a government instruction for foreign citizens with small businesses to stop their activities, and at the persistent transnational repression, surveillance and intimidation of human rights defenders and refugees in exile. They called on the Council to renew the mandate, to provide the SR with the necessary resources and to protect Burundian defenders and refugees.

Speakers criticised the lack of an independent judiciary, the culture of impunity, and the harassment of victims, health professionals and lawyers who speak out, observing

nonetheless that evidence continues to accumulate. They also called on the Government to cooperate with the mandate, to reopen the OHCHR country office, and to release all detained human rights defenders. One organisation, by contrast, emphasised that constructive cooperation between Burundi, UN mechanisms and the SR, based on technical assistance and capacity-building in areas such as forensic medicine, violence prevention and access to justice, could benefit the country as a whole. Civil society actors asked the SR how he would ensure that Burundi does not become a forgotten crisis and what should be done by the Council and its members in light of the persistent violations.

6. Concluding Remarks by the Special Rapporteur



In his concluding remarks, Mr. Zongo grouped the observations and questions raised into three categories: justice, responsibility and cooperation with the authorities; the 2027 presidential election; and vulnerable groups, CSO, exiles and refugees.

On access to justice for survivors, he identified three avenues: the retention of independent documentation of violations to be used as evidence before regional and global courts when national institutions do not act; the use of extraterritorial jurisdiction, notably to bring cases before the African Court or the Committee against Torture when victims cannot access national courts; and the protection of witnesses and victims who remain in Burundi, who are increasingly vulnerable as the elections approach. On cooperation, he called for a holistic

approach combining political and technical cooperation, noting that technical cooperation in areas such as civil registration and detention can proceed, together with cross-border cooperation on the return of refugees, while political cooperation is awaited.

On the elections, he identified three levers for the international community: the early deployment of independent election observers before the campaign begins, in order to document conditions for the registration of candidates and voters; financial and logistical support for local civil society engaged in electoral monitoring, who often face intimidation; and enhanced monitoring of the Imbonerakure's role in local administration, a factor in violence in previous electoral cycles.

Regarding civil society and independent media, he explained that most independent media and human rights defenders now work in exile, and that assistance should be directed to editorial outfits abroad and to threatened media professionals. He clarified that he had not wished to describe Burundi as a forgotten crisis, since it is a true crisis, and that the priority is to prevent the situation from deteriorating by monitoring it before the elections rather than waiting for the next annual report. He called for civil society in exile to be heard in real time and for the early activation of protection measures for individuals at risk, so as to avoid further forced returns of activists.

V. Position of the Geneva International Centre for Justice

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi and reaffirms its full support for his mandate. GICJ is particularly concerned by the coercive environment in which Burundi is approaching its 2027 presidential election, marked by extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and arbitrary detention attributed to the National Intelligence Service, the police and the Imbonerakure. GICJ is especially alarmed by the near-total dominance of the ruling party in elected institutions, the obstacles placed on independent candidacies, the persecution of journalists, human rights defenders and opponents, and the climate of impunity that prevents victims from obtaining justice. GICJ is also particularly worried by reports of forced returns of Burundian refugees and of the transnational repression of exiles, in disregard of the principle of non-refoulement. GICJ regrets Burundi's persistent refusal to cooperate with the mandate, and stresses the urgent need to act preventively, before the human costs of an electoral crisis become irreversible.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) calls on the Republic of Burundi to:

- Cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur, grant him unhindered access to the country and reopen the country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in accordance with its obligations as a member of the United Nations;
- Guarantee the conditions for free, fair and credible elections in line with Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, by ensuring political pluralism, revising the Electoral Code to guarantee the independence of the Electoral Commission, lifting disproportionate candidacy requirements, and accepting a long-term independent international electoral observation mission;
- Identify, demobilise and reintegrate children associated with the Imbonerakure or other political or security structures, and keep schools free from recruitment and coercive propaganda, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Put an end to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and arbitrary detention in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol, demobilise the

Imbonerakure from security functions, and ensure prompt, impartial and independent investigations and reparation for victims.

GICJ calls on other states to:

- Support the preventive deployment of independent election observers and provide financial and logistical support to Burundian civil society and to independent media working in exile, ahead of the May 2027 election;
- Respect the principle of non-refoulement under the Convention against Torture, the 1951 Refugee Convention and customary international law, by refraining from any forced return of Burundian refugees and asylum seekers, and protect Burundian human rights defenders and journalists in exile from transnational repression;
- Pursue accountability for the most serious crimes, including through extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction, and support the preservation of evidence and the work of regional and international bodies, so that impunity in Burundi is met with concrete consequences;
- Renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and provide it with adequate resources, in view of the persistent violations and the risks identified ahead of the 2027 elections.

VI. References

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi:

https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-burundi



@geneva4justice

Geneva International Centre for Justice

info@gicj.org

https://www.gicj.org/

Geneva International Centre for Justice