

Why is the United Nations Financing Crimes Against Humanity in Burundi?

The UN pays more than \$13 million a year to Burundi for 767 peacekeepers, providing the East African nation with vital support for a systematic campaign of rape, torture, and murder

March 19, 2019: Since 2015, President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi has ordered his defense forces to attack anyone deemed to oppose his regime, an onslaught that has generated international condemnation.

During the same period, the United Nations has paid the Nkurunziza regime large sums of money for the services of those same Burundian defense forces, who don blue helmets and patrol crisis zones as UN peacekeepers.

There are currently [767](#) Burundian peacekeepers serving with the United Nations. A total of [751](#) of those 767 peacekeepers are in MINUSCA, the UN's mission in the Central African Republic, which has been rocked by numerous sexual exploitation and abuse scandals.

The UN continues to deploy Nkurunziza's forces despite an explicit statement from the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi (UNIIB) that Burundian soldiers are not fit to be peacekeepers.

"The United Nations and the African Union should phase out the use of Burundian troops in Peacekeeping operations while the crisis continues," the UNIIB said in a [report](#) from September 2016.

Burundian peacekeepers serving in UN peacekeeping missions have been accused of committing sexual abuse against those they are pledged to protect: A total of 43 Burundian peacekeepers have been accused since 2015 of committing child rape, sexual activity with a minor, sexual assault of an adult, or rape of an adult, according to the UN's Conduct and Discipline [database](#). None of the 43 has been punished. The alleged victims include 50 children, 25 adults, and five individuals of unknown age.

As of July 2018, the UN [pays](#) USD 1,428 per month for each soldier provided by a troop-contributing country to a peacekeeping mission, a rate set by the UN General Assembly. The UN delivers the money not to the soldier but to the troop-contributing country.

The UN, then, pays Burundi \$1,095,276 a month for its 767 peacekeepers, which amounts to \$13,143,312 a year.

The money is a significant contribution to the coffers of the East African nation. Burundi's military budget was [\\$56.3 million in 2017](#).

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has repeatedly claimed that the UN is vetting troops to weed out *individuals* with criminal records of sexual offenses. But what about an *entire military* with a criminal history of sexual offenses, with a record of rape-as-policy?

Three separate UN reports—released in 2016, 2017, and 2018—detail shocking acts of sexual violence committed by police, soldiers, and militia members in Burundi. Victims were left with severe and enduring physical and psychological trauma. Women contracted HIV, became pregnant, or suffered miscarriages. The majority of the victims were targeted because they or their spouses belonged or were thought to belong to the opposition, refused to join pro-government forces, or wished to remain apolitical.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has opened an [investigation](#) into alleged crimes against humanity in Burundi. A three-judge panel of the ICC [found](#) "reasonable basis to believe that the crime of rape as a crime against humanity" was committed by Burundian defense forces "against women and girls perceived to be associated with or to sympathize with the opposition against the ruling party."

Mr. Guterres has repeatedly touted the UN's "zero-tolerance" approach to the crisis of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel. The continued presence of Burundian forces in UN peacekeeping exposes the hollowness of Mr. Guterres' claims.

The UN is paying to send soldiers from a criminal regime into the civil strife of the Central African Republic, exposing vulnerable women and children to grave danger. It is a scandal and an outrage. It must stop.

THE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST BURUNDIAN PEACEKEEPERS

The following [cases](#) have been referred to the government of Burundi, which, according to international agreement, is responsible for investigating and prosecuting its own military peacekeepers.

In September 2018, a Burundian peacekeeper in the Central African Republic was accused of raping a child during the month of August 2018. The UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) investigated and a National Investigation Officer (NIO) from Burundi was appointed. The case has been referred to the government of Burundi. Any action by Burundi is "pending," according to the UN.

In December 2017, a Burundian peacekeeper in a Formed Police Unit in the Central African Republic was accused of raping a child in "May-June" 2015. The UN's OIOS investigated and a Burundian NIO was appointed. The investigation, according to the UN, lasted 360 days. The allegation was deemed "substantiated." The case has been referred to the government of Burundi. Any action by Burundi is "pending," according to the UN.

The following case against three Burundian peacekeepers remains stalled because of a "UN review."

In June 2016, three Burundian peacekeepers in the Central African Republic were accused of raping two adults and engaging in sexual activity with a minor on an unspecified date in 2015. The UN's OIOS investigated and an NIO from Burundi was appointed. The investigation lasted 51 days. The rape accusation was deemed "unsubstantiated" for "insufficient evidence," but the accusation of sexual activity with a minor remains unresolved pending "UN review."

The following cases were closed for "insufficient evidence."

In June 2016, two Burundian peacekeepers in the Central African Republic were accused of raping two children. The UN's OIOS investigated and a Burundian NIO was appointed. The investigation lasted 81 days. The allegation was deemed "unsubstantiated" for "insufficient evidence." The case was closed.

In March 2016, four Burundian peacekeepers in the Central African Republic were accused of raping one child. The OIOS investigated and a Burundian NIO was appointed. The investigation lasted 534 days. The allegation was found to be "unsubstantiated" for "insufficient evidence." The case was closed.

In December 2015, a Burundian peacekeeper serving in the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) was accused of sexually assaulting an adult during December 2015. The UN's OIOS investigated. The allegation was deemed "unsubstantiated" for "insufficient evidence" after an 85-day investigation. The case was closed.

The following case is stalled "pending additional information from the Member State" and "pending ID of personnel involved."

In June 2015, a Burundian peacekeeper in the Central African Republic was accused of engaging in sexual activity with two children during June 2015. The UN's OIOS investigated. A Burundian NIO was appointed. The investigation lasted 529 days. The case is "pending additional information from the Member State" and "pending ID of personnel involved."

The following case involved dozens of rape allegations, which were downgraded to "fraternization," resulting in the closure of the cases.

In March 2016, a group of 30 Burundian peacekeepers in the Central African Republic were accused of raping 22 adults, 42 children, and five individuals of unknown age in 2014 or 2015. The UN's OIOS investigated and an NIO from Burundi was appointed. The investigation lasted for 266 days. The action was "closed" after the allegations were deemed "unsubstantiated." It was determined that there was no "sexual exploitation and abuse but fraternization."

THE UN AND ICC INVESTIGATIONS

In the months following the outbreak of unrest in Burundi in 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights created the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi (UNIIB). The UNIIB released a [report](#) of its findings in September 2016, which noted

widespread sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls by Burundian defense forces. The UNIIB said it had documented "a number of cases" of sexual mutilation.

In the wake of the UNIIB report, the UN Human Rights Council created a Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, which, following a year of investigation, delivered a searing [report](#) on September 4, 2017. The Commission detailed numerous cases of rape, attempted rape, and, as in the UNIIB report, sexual mutilation.

The Commission said it had "reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed in Burundi since April 2015" and requested the International Criminal Court to open an investigation. The ICC did so on October 25, 2017. Two days later, Burundi withdrew from the Rome Statute, the ICC's legal foundation. A three-judge panel of the ICC subsequently [ruled](#) that the court still "has jurisdiction over crimes allegedly committed while Burundi was a state party to the ICC Rome Statute." The ICC investigation [continues](#).

At the same time, the UN Human Rights Council extended the Commission of Inquiry mandate once again. After another year of investigation, during which several hundred additional witnesses were interviewed, the Commission issued its second [report](#), which documented numerous instances of sexual violence.

"In most of the cases, the women were raped by one or several men during attacks on their homes, which often took place at night," the September 2018 report said. "The rapes were often accompanied by other types of physical violence against the victims and, in some cases, against other members of the household."

In September 2018, the Human Rights Council [extended](#) the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry for an additional year. It continues its work.

Burundi's appalling human rights record has been the subject of headlines in recent weeks.

On March 5, 2019, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, [announced](#) that the government of Burundi had shuttered the UN Human Rights Office in Burundi's capital city of Bujumbura. The Burundian government claimed the country had made such strides in human rights that the UN office was no longer necessary.

A week later, on March 12, 2019, the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi provided an [oral briefing](#) to the Human Rights Council.

"Cases of sexual violence persist, presumably encouraged by the general climate of impunity prevailing in the country and the socio-economic vulnerability of households, affecting in particular women and girls in rural areas and those who come from families of voluntary returnees," the statement reads in part. "This type of violence also targets women whose family members are considered to be part of the political opposition."

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