



July 16, 2019

H.E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande
Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations
Chair, UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations

Your Excellency:

The autocratic regime of Burundi, which contributes 740 contingent troops as peacekeepers to the UN mission in the Central African Republic, has grown ever more contemptuous of the international community and the United Nations in all its facets.

Burundi repudiates the findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi (COI), which is now in its third term. The COI [asserts](#) that it has "reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed in Burundi since April 2015." The COI's reports and oral briefings have detailed how Burundi's government forces continue to commit sexual violence against women and girls. The point was repeated during the COI's [oral briefing](#) at the Human Rights Council on July 2. "In several instances, these cases of violence took the form of gang rapes, including in the midst of attacks on their homes," the COI said.

Burundi's ambassador to Geneva, Rénovat Tabu, [responded](#) to the July 2 oral briefing by noting that Burundians are sick of the COI's "lying, divisive, provocative, and distracting reports."

Burundi thumbs its nose at the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is currently conducting 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 Burundi's government forces "against women and girls perceived to be associated with or to sympathize with the opposition against the ruling party." In response to the ICC's decision to open an investigation, Burundi withdrew from the Rome Statute, the ICC's legal foundation.

"The ICC has shown itself to be a political instrument and weapon used by the west to enslave" other states, [said](#) presidential spokesman Willy Nyamitwe after the withdrawal. "This is a great victory for Burundi because it has defended its sovereignty and national pride."

Nonetheless, the ICC retains jurisdiction over crimes allegedly committed while Burundi was a state party to the ICC's Rome Statute.

Burundi expresses derision for the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). In March, the government shuttered the UN Human Rights Office in Bujumbura, claiming it was no longer needed.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, criticized the decision, noting that the office continued to receive allegations of human rights violations and abuses.

Burundi has threatened to end relations with the UN Envoy to Burundi, Michel Kafando.

It has demanded an end to Security Council meetings on Burundi, which are meant to be held every three months.

"In no way does the situation in Burundi represent a threat to international peace and security," [said](#) Burundi's ambassador to the UN, Albert Shingiro, during the Security Council meeting on June 14—which was held without Mr. Kafando. "I hope this is the last time Burundi is discussed by the Security Council."

Burundi has demonized critical voices from the diaspora, many of whom take to Twitter and Facebook to decry the beatings, arbitrary arrests, disappearances, killings, and rapes of those in Burundi who are deemed to oppose the regime.

The government has organized demonstrations in Bujumbura against [Human Rights Watch](#) and the [International Crisis Group](#), both of which published critical reports on the situation in Burundi in June.

Burundi has gone so far as to [elevate](#) the leader of the Imbonerakure—the government militia accused of committing widespread sexual violence—to become the new head of the state broadcaster, RTNB.

And Burundi displays contempt for anyone who would question the behavior of its UN troops in the Central African Republic (CAR).

Forty-three Burundian peacekeepers have been reported to the UN for allegedly raping or sexually abusing women and children since 2015. The alleged victims include 50 children, 25 adults, and five individuals of unknown age, almost all from CAR.

According to international agreement, the government of Burundi is responsible for investigating and prosecuting its own military and police peacekeepers. But there is no evidence that the Burundian government has taken any action against its accused peacekeepers. In one case, a UN investigation “substantiated” an allegation that a Burundian peacekeeper raped a child. The UN banned the peacekeeper (who had already returned to Burundi) from participating in future assignments with the UN. But Burundi’s investigation and prosecution of the child rape case is “pending,” [according](#) to the UN, meaning that criminal justice has not been served.

That is business as usual for this noncompliant contributor to UN Peacekeeping. All of the sexual abuse cases involving Burundian peacekeepers have been dismissed for alleged lack of evidence, stalled in bureaucratic limbo, or are still “pending” action by the Burundian government.

Burundi is unfazed by Security Council Resolution 2272, which authorizes the Secretary-General to remove a country's troops from UN Peacekeeping if that country fails to appropriately investigate and/or hold to account its peacekeepers accused of sexual exploitation and abuse.

In the meantime, Burundi happily accepts payments from the UN for its role as a troop-contributing country.

Currently, [740 contingent troops](#) from Burundi are contracted by the UN for its peacekeeping mission in CAR, paid for by the mandatory dues for peacekeeping operations contributed to the UN by all Member States. At present, the figure amounts to \$13 million a year, a significant sum for a government with a military budget of roughly \$60 million a year.

Your Excellency, soldiers from Burundi have no business serving as UN peacekeepers.

The UN should no longer deploy soldiers from a regime with a well-documented record of committing sexual violence with impunity against innocent civilians, in their own country and beyond.

The women and children of CAR have been promised protection. Instead they are being sacrificed to the UN’s need to staff peacekeeping operations with soldiers, any soldiers, who are willing to patrol crisis zones.

Burundi has repeatedly flouted the norms of the United Nations and shown itself unwilling to adhere to international standards of good conduct.

The United Nations must stop financing the government of Burundi and send its unworthy peacekeepers home now.

We urge the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations to take determined action on this grave matter.

Sincerely,



Paula Donovan
Co-Director, AIDS-Free World



Stephen Lewis
Co-Director, AIDS-Free World

Cc: Members and Observers, UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations