

**Baroness Catherine Ashton**

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs  
and Security Policy  
Vice-President of the European Commission

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OFFICE**

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Dear Baroness Ashton,

**AS POLITICAL SPACE SHRINKS IN BURUNDI,  
THE EU MUST ENSURE HUMAN RIGHTS ARE UPHELD**

Ahead of Burundi's 2015 presidential, legislative and communal elections, Amnesty International's report, [Burundi: Locked down: A shrinking of political space](#), documents increasing violations of individuals' rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, including the harassment and intimidation of critical voices by the Government of Burundi.

The European Union (EU) and its member states have already issued public statements highlighting incidents and acts of intimidation which run counter to freedom of expression and association including the arrest of Human Rights Defender (HRD) Pierre Claver Mbonimpa.<sup>1</sup> The EU and its member states must continue to step up engagement to ensure the Government of Burundi provides space to political opposition groups, civil society and the media, to operate freely and independently, whilst holding to account state actors found responsible for human rights violations.

Today, the Burundian authorities routinely and arbitrarily deny groups the authorisation to hold meetings and demonstrations, whose purpose is often to discuss or raise concerns about political developments or state accountability for human rights. The Government of Burundi has denied political opposition groups, the press, the Burundian Bar Association and civil society organisations their rights to association and peaceful assembly.

The ruling party, National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie, CNDD-FDD) and members of the *Imbonerakure* (its youth wing) are perpetrating human rights abuses under the pretext of maintaining security at the local level. The *Imbonerakure* have intimidated political opposition members, prevented political party meetings from being held, and attacked members of the political opposition with impunity. Amnesty International is concerned by the government's failure to effectively investigate allegations of abuses by the *Imbonerakure*, and to bring those found responsible to justice.

In line with the EU's existing programmes on the rule of law, justice and good governance in Burundi, as well as with EU and member states' commitments to place human rights at the centre of all external action, and with multiple EU Human Rights Guidelines including on Freedom of Expression and Human Rights Defenders, Amnesty International calls on the EU and its member states to:

- Reinforce monitoring of the human rights situation in Burundi, and issue immediate, strong and unequivocal statements in response to further human rights violations
- Push for any election monitors deployed in 2015 to be trained, equipped and mandated to monitor human rights abuses in addition to election observation responsibilities

<sup>1</sup> "Déclaration du porte-parole sur la situation politique au Burundi," 10 June 2014.

[http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2014/140312\\_02\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2014/140312_02_en.pdf)

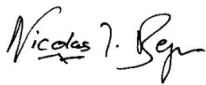
"Déclaration de la Délégation de l'Union Européenne sur le climat politique et l'arrestation du président de l'APRODH," 21 May 2014.

[http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/burundi/documents/press\\_corner/2014052101\\_fr.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/burundi/documents/press_corner/2014052101_fr.pdf)

- Call unequivocally for the release of human rights defender Pierre Claver Mbonimpa from detention
- Call on the Burundian authorities to ensure the respect of individuals' rights to expression, association and peaceful assembly, in line with international human rights standards, and immediately address impunity for human rights abuses committed by state actors. This can be supported by:
  - Allowing civil society groups and opposition parties to organise and hold meetings in line with their rights of association and peaceful assembly, and ensuring that opposition party members are not subjected to harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrest or detention
  - Ending harassment and intimidation of civil society activists and journalists, and ensuring that all individuals working to promote and protect human rights receive the full support of the state
  - Re-issuing clear instructions to local officials and the *Imbonerakure* that violence and statements inciting violence targeting political opposition members will not be tolerated, and will result in prosecution
  - Independently investigating and, where there is sufficient evidence, prosecuting all allegations of human rights abuses linked to the army, police, the *Imbonerakure* and the local administrative authorities
  - Ensuring that national legislation, both draft and in force, does not lead to violations of, nor threaten individuals' rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including the Law on Public Gatherings, the Press law, and the draft Law on Non-profit Organisations

We welcome your engagement to ensure an enabling environment for human rights work in Burundi, and stand ready to provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Nicolas J. Beger  
Director

Cc:

Koen Vervaeke, Senior Coordinator for the Great Lakes Region, EEAS  
Erminia Notarangelo, Head of Division, Central Africa and Great Lakes, EEAS  
Francesca Cardona, Desk Officer Burundi, EEAS  
Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM)  
Council Working Group on Africa (COAFR)