

## **Burundi: Human Rights Council must act to prevent further atrocities**

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(Geneva) - The UN Human Rights Council should convene a special, emergency session to address the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation and prevent further atrocities in Burundi, a group of leading NGOs has said in an [open letter to delegations](#) today.

Over the last few months and weeks, government and security officials have used increasingly incendiary language warning of a crackdown on 'enemies of the State', while opposition activists, journalists, human rights defenders and their family members have been murdered and disappeared. Government forces have used excessive force against peaceful protesters and forced the closure of independent media outlets.

On 6 November, the body of Welly Nzitonda, the son of prominent human rights defender Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, was found dead a few hours after he was arrested in the Mutakura neighborhood of Bujumbura where protests against the government have taken place. On 3 August, Mr Mbonimpa was himself shot in the face and neck, narrowly surviving. He was forced to seek medical treatment abroad. His son-in-law, Pascal Nshimirimana, was shot dead outside his home in Bujumbura on 9 October.

'The targeting and killing of human rights defenders and their family members is shocking and chilling in and of itself, but it is also often a precursor to wider atrocities in a country,' said ISHR's Head of African Advocacy, Clement Voule.

'Journalists and human rights defenders play a vital role in documenting and exposing abuses and pushing for accountability. Their targeting and killing can lead, and is often intended to lead, to a situation where atrocities can be perpetrated with impunity. Member States of the Human Rights Council should heed the warning signs associated with the targeting of defenders in Burundi and support a special session to secure their protection and establish mechanisms to monitor and ensure accountability for the atrocities occurring in the country before it is simply too late,' Mr Voule said.

With so many human rights defenders already killed, disappeared or forced into exile, the NGOs are calling for the special session of the Council to 'appoint a group of independent experts with relevant expertise in mass atrocity prevention and combating incitement to violence on political and ethnic grounds, to monitor, verify and report on the human rights situation in Burundi'.

The open letter sent by a group of 11 NGOs - including FIDH, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, ISHR, and the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, among others - is available [here](#).

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