

Statement at 31st session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 10: General Debate – Burundi

Thank you Mr President, High Commissioner

The International Service for Human Rights is deeply concerned about the continuing deterioration in the human rights situation in Burundi.

Since the beginning of the political crisis, 260,000 Burundians have fled their country, including many prominent human rights defenders. There has been an increase in targeted killings, mass arbitrary arrests, torture and detention.

Human rights defenders are paying a high price in this ever-worsening situation, with restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, targeted killings and forced exile affecting them directly.

Burundian citizens and human rights defenders are paralysed by fear. The government and the military have the responsibility to break the cycle of violence. ISHR also urges the opposition to rein in violence among supporters. Burundian authorities should fully and impartially investigate recent allegations of human rights violations and hold to account all those responsible for human rights crimes.

ISHR welcome's Burundi's recent decision to allow the deployment of Human Rights Council-mandated experts to Burundi, as well as the African Union human rights observers and military monitors.

We call on the Council-mandated experts to pay special attention to the critical situation of Burundian human rights defenders and their protection needs. The work of defenders is crucial to peace, security, sustainable development and a democratic future for Burundi, founded on respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Finally, ISHR echoes the call made by Canada on behalf of a group of states to the elected members of the Council, in general, and the Government of Burundi, in particular, to uphold the highest standard in the promotion and protection of human rights and to cooperate fully with the Council and its mandates and mechanisms. Failure to adhere to such basic standards should precipitate public discussion in this Council as to a State's fitness and eligibility for membership, with the possibility of referral of the State concerned to the General Assembly for suspension or expulsion from this Council if the necessary undertakings are not given and fulfilled.

I thank you, Mr President.