

**Statement at 37th session of the UN Human Rights Council**

**Item 4: Interactive Dialogue on HC oral update on Burundi**

Speaker: **Adelaide Etong Kame**

Mr President,

ISHR welcomes the newly appointed members of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi. The situation in Burundi is alarming. Burundian civil society actors, and particularly human rights defenders and journalists, have been the primary targets of systematic oppression by the authorities. Journalists and human rights defenders face heightened risks of threats, intimidation, and violent attacks; while the activities of civil society organisations have been suspended for ‘disturbing security in the country’.

Notwithstanding this, during Burundi’s Universal Periodic Review on 19 January 2018, the Burundian Government rejected allegations that it has persecuted human rights defenders. It claimed that defenders were prosecuted under the country’s ordinary legal framework, and were not targeted for legitimate human rights activities. Similarly, the Government argued that the detained journalists had been guilty of violating Burundi’s criminal code, in one case alleging that they had advocated a coup d’état.

We call Burundian government to repeal all laws restricting the activities of human rights defenders and investigate abuses committed against them. The law should safeguard and enable the vital work of defenders, not criminalise it.

In spite of this worsening situation, Burundian authorities continue to deny access to the Commission of Inquiry and refuse to cooperate with regional and international mechanisms to end the gross human rights violations in the country. This behaviour is wholly incompatible with Burundi’s status as a member of the Human Rights Council. Burundi should fulfil its obligation to cooperate fully with the UN systems and its mechanisms. ISHR welcome the extension of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry and urges Burundi to review its position and start cooperating with all UN mechanisms.

Finally, ISHR calls Burundi to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders, many of whom have been forced to flee the country.

I thank you.