

Statement at 40th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Item 4: Enhanced Interactive Dialogue with COI on Burundi

Speaker: Coraline Challamel

M. President,

The International Service for Human Rights remains highly concerned by the restrictions human rights defenders are facing in Burundi.

The law on foreign non-governmental organisations adopted in January 2017 has recently forced several international NGOs to end their activities in the country. Indeed, the law establishes, inter alia, a strict control of their finances, significant administrative fees and imposes ethnic quotas on local recruitment. These restrictions continue to hinder access to the country and prevent defenders from documenting human rights violations.

ISHR continues to be concerned by the case of Germain Rukuki, a human rights defender arrested and recently sentenced to 32 years of imprisonment. The decision of the Court of Appeal of Bujumbura is still pending, as it failed to hand it down within the 30 day time-limit. We invite the Council to call on Burundi to guarantee the right to a fair trial to all defendants.

ISHR is also concerned by the recent closing of the High-Commissioner Office in Burundi, proving once again the refusal of the government to cooperate with UN bodies. Indeed, the government justifies this closure by the creation in recent years of several national human rights protection bodies. However, the recent downgrading of the National Human Rights Commission to status B is proof of the inefficiency and lack of independence of national mechanisms. Since 2015, the situation of human rights in the country has continued to deteriorate.

ISHR urges Burundi to reconsider its position and to fully cooperate, in good faith, with all United Nations mechanisms, including the Commission of Inquiry.

Finally, ISHR calls on Burundi to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders to carry out their work, as many were forced to flee.

I thank you.