

Josep Borrell Fontelles

High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Vice-President of the European Commission

Dear High Representative Borrell,

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, write to express our serious concern with regards to recent developments in Burundi, notably the rising political tensions ahead of the May 2020 elections and the sweeping arrests, killings and other forms of violence against opposition members and supporters.

We condemn the large-scale human rights violations taking place in the country and request you to do the same.

We call upon the EU institutions and Member States, including their diplomatic representations on the ground, to urge the Burundian government to restore the conditions to enable free, fair and peaceful elections to take place.

We believe that free, fair and peaceful elections can only take place if civil society organisations, human rights defenders and independent media can operate in a free and independent manner and report on human rights abuses without hindrance. We urge you to call on the Burundian authorities to immediately release all human rights defenders and journalists unlawfully detained and allow those who remain in the country to operate without fear of violence and other abuses.

We also ask you to call on the main electoral candidates to urge their followers to restrain from violence and promote a non-violent approach to any dispute that may arise related to the elections. We encourage you to ask the Burundian government to ensure the neutrality of the police, the electoral commission and local authorities before, during and after the elections.

The 2020 election and its aftermath could be an opportunity to re-establish a strengthened political dialogue with Burundi, depending on how the situation evolves in the weeks to come. However, we would like to reiterate that a new head of state should not prompt the EU to resume business as usual with the Burundian government if there is no tangible progress on human rights and the fight against impunity. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the benchmarks set out by the Council as conditions to lift the article 96 measures. The opening of political and civic space should remain a *sine qua non* condition before resuming direct government-to-government development cooperation.

The risk of increasing political repression and violence, combined with the economic burden of the crisis and the dire humanitarian situation, are deeply worrying. We are concerned that they could lead to more serious rights violations with potentially serious consequences across the region, and urge you to stand ready to provide necessary assistance, including to neighboring governments, regional institutions and humanitarian agencies.

As the situation remains volatile, we ask that you put Burundi on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Council at the earliest opportunity. We also strongly believe this issue should be addressed to the African Union Commission.

We would be very interested in an exchange of thoughts and a briefing on actions undertaken by you and your services with regards to Burundi.

Yours faithfully,

Maria Arena, MEP

Michael Gahler, MEP

Roberta Metsola, MEP

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, MEP

Jan-Christoph Oetjen, MEP

Soraya Rodriguez, MEP

Heide Hannes, MEP

Carlos Zorrinho, MEP

Erik Marquardt, MEP

Marie-Pierre Vedrenne, MEP

Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, MEP

Matias Marisa, MEP

Gusmão José, MEP

Idoia Villanueva Ruiz, MEP

Kouloglou Stelios, MEP

Jirí Pospíšil, MEP

Glucksmann Raphaël, MEP

Michèle Rivasi, MEP