

Josep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice-President of the European Commission

Dear High Representative Borrell,

On March 14, 2016, following the decision of the Council of the European Union relating to the conclusion of the consultation procedure with the Republic of Burundi under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, the EU suspended the direct financial support to the Government of Burundi. This decision followed the finding of the violation by the State of Burundi of its international obligations and commitments in terms of respect for human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance referred to in the article 9 of the said agreement. Since then, the European Parliament has called several times for the maintenance of these sanctions notably in the resolution on Burundi, in particular freedom of expression (2020/2502 (RSP)) in January 2020 and that of July 5, 2018 on Burundi (2018/2785 (RSP)).

These measures were taken in the context of massive human rights violations attributable to certain elements of the defense and security corps and to the young Imbonerakure of the ruling party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy - Forces pour Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD). The latter have been qualified as militiamen by the United Nations.

This context was also characterized by failure to respect democratic principles and the rule of law as well as those relating to the transparent and responsible management of public affairs.

We have taken note of the fact that the European Union has initiated a process of political dialogue, ultimately aimed at lifting the measures taken in 2016, in application of Article 96, paragraph 2, point a) by virtue of which "these measures are lifted as soon as the reasons which motivated them disappear". However, these reasons are far from disappearing.

Violations such as violations of the right to life, kidnappings and / or enforced disappearances, sexual violence based on gender, torture, arbitrary arrests and detentions mainly against members of political opposition parties are still widely present. These illegal arrests and detentions are causing prison overcrowding and the government is making no real effort to end it.

The hate speech against opponents and ethnic minorities maintained and encouraged by senior state officials including the Head of State, the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister and the Secretary General of the CNDD FDD poses a serious threat to the future of the country and the region, given that this kind of talk played a major role in the preparation and commission of the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994.

The resumption of dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Burundi is essential but it cannot be envisaged without evidence that the government wishes to improve the human rights situation in the country.

Therefore, we call on the Burundian government to lift the arrest warrants wrongly imposed on journalists and human rights defenders, in particular those accused of participating in the coup d'état of May 13, 2015, whose names are: Nininahazwe Pacific, Nshimirimana Vital, Nduwimana Patrick, Barankitse Marguerite, Rugurika Bob, Niyonkuru Gilbert, Bashirahishize

Dieudonné, Niyongere Armel, Mitabaro Patrick, Niyuhire Anne, Havyarimana Arcade and Muhozi Innocent.

In addition, several human rights defenders and journalists have been arrested and convicted in connection with the repression of civil society and journalists, as was the case with Germain Rukuki and Nestor Nibitanga. We call for their immediate and unconditional release as well as for their safety to be ensured so that they can exercise their human rights without fear of reprisal.

We urge the Burundian government to ensure the safe voluntary return of political refugees to Burundi. These returns must be carried out in accordance with international laws and the government must ensure that those who return do not face reprisals and have access to services.

We ask that the reinstatement of the private media destroyed by the services of the Burundian government in 2015 as well as that of the organizations be ensured, on the one hand financially and on the other hand ensuring the safety of the people working there. They are the following organizations: Acat-Burundi (Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture), Forsc (Forum for the Strengthening of Civil Society), Aprodh (Burundian Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons), Focode (Forum for Consciousness and Development), RCP (Network of honest citizens) and the oldest human rights organization in Burundi called the Burundian Human Rights League "Iteka".

The media concerned are the RPA (Radio Publique Africaine) which was subsequently closed on April 27, 2015 by the Minister of the Interior followed by the suspension of the association for the African Public Radio which created the RPA, UBJ (Burundian Association of Journalists), Radio Bonesha FM and Radio Télévision Renaissance.

Finally, it is important that the Burundian authorities work to disarm the militias which intimidate the local populations.

Mr High Representative, Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement provides for the reassessment of progress in the protection of human rights, we ask that this assessment be made on the basis of the conditions set out above before any resumption of dialogue with the Burundian authorities.

Best regards,

Maria Arena MEP
Brando Benifei MEP
Norbert Neuser MEP
Rosa D'Amato MEP
Schieder Andreas MEP
Dietmar Köster MEP
Guetta Bernard MEP
Loiseau Nathalie MEP
Mavrides Costas MEP
Bogusław Liberadzki MEP
Emmanuel Maurel MEP
Austrevicius Petras MEP
Oetjen Jan-Christoph MEP

Ivan Štefanec MEP
Jordi Solé MEP
Hannes Heide MEP
Piernicola Pedicini MEP
Melchior Karen MEP
Karin Karlsbro MEP
Bettina Vollath MEP
Villumsen Nikolaj MEP
Diana Riba i Giner MEP
Erik Marquardt MEP
Carles Puigdemont MEP
Antoni Comín MEP
Clara Ponsatí MEP
Villanueva Ruiz Idoia MEP
Yenbou Salima MEP
Javier Nart MEP
Katrín Langensiepen MEP
Cozzolino Andrea MEP
Toia Patrizia MEP
Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana MEP
Ignazio Corrao MEP
Fabio Massimo Castaldo MEP
López Gil Leopoldo MEP
Marc Angel MEP
Isabel Santos MEP
Noichl Maria MEP
Smeriglio Massimiliano MEP
Urtasun Ernest MEP
Udo Bullmann MEP
Christian Sagartz MEP