

Statement at 38th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 6: Consideration of UPR outcomes - Burundi

Speaker: Salma El Hosseiny

Mr President,

This third cycle of the UPR comes as Burundi is experiencing a serious political crisis which has already caused thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 400 000 people.

Burundian civil society actors, and particularly human rights defenders and journalists, have been the primary targets of systematic oppression by the authorities. Germain Rukuki, a human rights defenders working for Association des Juristes Catholiques du Burundi, was recently sentenced to 32 years in prison for, among other things, “breach of State security” and “participation in an insurrectional movement”. On 18 June, he was hastily removed from the hospital where he underwent surgery on his leg a few days before, preventing him from receiving appropriate care after such an intervention. We urge Burundian authorities to drop all charges and immediately release Germain Rukuki.

Despite this, during the Universal Periodic Review of Burundi 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 legal framework and were not targeted for legitimate human rights activities.

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

In particular, ISHR calls on Burundi to:

- Further allow civil society organisations and individual defenders access to interact with the Special Rapporteurs without fear of reprisal.
- Refrain from stigmatising defenders operating inside and outside the country and condemn and prosecute all acts of intimidation and reprisals against defenders.

ISHR invites Burundi to work with civil society to implement the UPR recommendations and create an enabling environment for human rights defenders.

I thank you.