



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

SDIR • NUMBER 127 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, November 6, 2018

—
Chair

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, November 6, 2018

• (1300)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.)): Good afternoon. Welcome to the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

Today, we will be updating the study we have been doing on the human rights situation in Burundi and Rwanda.

[Translation]

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the subcommittee on Thursday, June 16, 2016, the subcommittee is resuming its study of the human rights situation in Burundi.

Today we welcome two witnesses via teleconference. The first is Mr. Armel Niyongere, a lawyer. He is the president of Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture au Burundi, or ACAT-Burundi, and the originator and director of SOS-Torture/Burundi. The second witness is Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe, president of the Forum pour la conscience et le développement.

I want to thank the witnesses for participating, and for their work and perseverance on human rights.

[English]

We did attempt to do a video conference with our two witnesses, but due to the technical issues between here and Africa, we have them just on teleconference. What this means is that the interpretation will likely be subsequent to, as opposed to during, the intervention. They will summarize the answer, so please wait. The interpretation will then kick in.

[Translation]

I will ask the witnesses to state their name when they begin speaking. Since we do not have a video image, it is very important for us to know who is speaking.

[English]

They will be speaking in French, so please do wait for the interpretation, if you require interpretation.

We don't have witnesses here in the room, but we are still televised, and the entire room will be televised. Please be aware of that as well.

[Translation]

Let us begin with our first witness.

Mr. Niyongere, please go ahead.

Mr. Armel Niyongere (Lawyer, As an Individual): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

My name is Armel Niyongere. I am a lawyer. I am also the president of Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture au Burundi and the director of SOS-Torture/Burundi. I am counsel to the victims in the International Criminal Court investigation. There are 1,600 victims' families. I am one of the defence lawyers for the civilian parties.

• (1305)

The Chair: Very good.

You now have 10 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Armel Niyongere: Okay.

My presentation will focus on the political impasse and the risk of an explosion of violence.

First, I will show how the failure of the fifth and final round of the Inter-Burundi Dialogue led by the East African Community is deepening Burundi's political impasse and increasing the risk of an escalation of violence as the only means of political expression.

Second, I will provide some typical examples of the context. From January to October 2018, Burundi saw a surge in human rights violations. There were also acts of torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment leading to death. There were instances of enforced disappearances, but my friend Pacifique Nininahazwe can elaborate on that. That is his area of expertise and he has a lot more information about it than I do.

I will also talk about sexual assault and extrajudicial executions and murders.

Finally, I will talk about the venom propagated by the hate speech of certain authorities in the country, starting with Pierre Nkurunziza, the President of Burundi.

After the failure of the fifth and final round of the Inter-Burundi talks, scheduled from October 24 to 29, 2018, Burundi finds itself in a serious political impasse, with a risk of violence as the only means of political expression.

I also want to talk about how the hope for compromise was ruined by the boycotting of the proceedings by the government and the parties from its own movement, as they did not attend the final round.

Representatives of CNARED, an opposition in exile platform, and opponents residing in Burundi, for their part, met from September 21 to 23, 2018, in Entebbe, Uganda, and produced a joint memorandum to be issued to the facilitators.

In general, all the parties deplored the unilateral revision of the constitution by the Burundi government and stressed that the Arusha Accord must be upheld, which still represents the foundation for a return to peace and security in Burundi.

There must be conditions that are conducive to respect for human rights and the voluntary return of refugees so that free, peaceful and transparent elections can be held in 2020. Similarly, the media that were destroyed and the civil society organizations that were suspended or eliminated must be restored.

Clearly, the failure of mediation by the East African Community and the government's continuous closing of public space are important factors in the deterioration of the political and security situation, in view of the rise in hate speech and violence during the 2020 election process.

I also want to give a few typical examples of the context. To this end, I have sent some photos to the clerk of the subcommittee.

Burundi has seen a surge in human rights violations from January to October 2018. This year has been marked by numerous human rights violations committed in a general climate of terror maintained by the government using elements of the national police and the national intelligence service, as well as the Imbonerakure militia and a few elements of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, or FDLR, which committed genocide in Rwanda in 1994. The Imbonerakure militia controls the entire territory and constantly commits all kinds of abuse, unchecked, and with impunity.

● (1310)

On the whole, the human rights violations committed from January to October 2018 are similar to those committed in the three previous years. SOS-Torture/Burundi recorded 182 murders, 571 arbitrary arrests, 91 cases of torture, 24 enforced disappearances, and 27 cases of sexual assault. These various acts were committed concurrently by the national police, the national intelligence service, and Imbonerakure militiamen and the CNDD-FDD party, with complete impunity.

The examples highlighted illustrate the unchecked power of the Imbonerakure militia over the population and the territory. Officers of the national police and the national intelligence service commit all kinds of abuses. These abuses have repeatedly resulted in the death of the victims, or serious damage to their health.

As to acts of torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment leading to death, let consider the emblematic case of Simon Bizimana. This young member of the Cendajuru commune, Cankuzo province, was murdered for his refusal, on religious grounds, to register to vote in the constitutional referendum of May 2018. Simon Bizimana died in Cankuzo hospital on

March 17, 2018. A month earlier, on February 14, 2018, to be precise, he was arrested by the Gisoro hill leader, Marc Nimpa, and interrogated on his knees in front of the Cendajuru police chief. He was then allegedly taken to the bush and beaten with a rebar and his bible by the Cendajuru commune administrator, Béatrice Nibaruta. The following day, after another torture session at the hands of the Cendajuru administrator, the young man, with blood coming out of his nose and ears, was taken to the province's capital by Bonaventure Niyonkuru, the provincial head of the national intelligence service in Cankuzo. You will find this young man's full story in the 119th report of SOS-Torture/Burundi.

I will now talk about cases of torture with grave consequences.

On September 15, 2018, Alexis Nibizi, the communal secretary of the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, along with Imbonerakure militiamen Augustin Nkurikiye, Nestor Nzokiranteve and Paul, violently tortured Elias Yamuremye on Rugajo hill, Cibitoke province. The victim is the vice-representative of the opposition party FNL faithful to MP Agathon Rwaswa, in Mugina commune. The local head of the governing party blamed him for refusing to join the CNDD-FDD party. Mr. Yamuremye had to be evacuated to a health centre for intensive care. You will find his full story in the 145th report of SOS-Torture/Burundi.

My friend Pacifique Nininahazwe will go into greater detail about the enforced disappearances.

Since the start of the crisis, there have been many enforced disappearances in Burundi, a number of which could be politically motivated. Those targeted are young people, but also people who are seen as opponents. Individuals from the Democratic Republic of Congo and especially Rwanda have been key targets in these disappearances.

The Chair: Pardon me, but your 10 minutes are up. Will you be able to finish your presentation soon? You may also speak during the question and answer period.

● (1315)

Mr. Armel Niyongere: Okay.

As to cases of sexual assault, rape has become a routine occurrence in Burundi. They are committed nearly across the board, even without regard for age. Very young children are targeted, as are seniors. I have already sent you my presentation. You can review the photos and the cases presented.

There is also the venom propagated by hate speech. We have identified the speech given by Pierre Nkurunziza at the gathering for the official start of the dissemination period for the new constitution, on December 12, 2017, in Bugendana commune, Gitega province. There was also the speech given by Nzopfabarusha, an influential member of the CNDD-FDD. There was the speech by the Gashoho commune administrator, Désiré Bigirimana...

The Chair: Thank you very much. I have to stop you there; we are out of time. We have to move on to the second witness. You may comment further during the question and answer period.

Mr. Armel Niyongere: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: The second witness is Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe.

You may begin. You have 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe (President, Forum pour la Conscience et le Développement): Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, it is an honour to appear before you to report on the current situation in my country of Burundi. I recognize the importance of this opportunity, especially since I do not have the right to speak before my own country's parliament. Because of my commitment to defending human rights in Burundi, I am in fact accused of being a criminal and traitor to my country.

Like all the main human rights organizations, my organization, FOCODE, is banned in Burundi. My organization's bank accounts and my personal accounts have been seized. There is an international arrest warrant against me, as there is against those in charge of the other main organizations that defend human rights in Burundi. Most fortunately, these bogus warrants have been disregarded by the international community. Finally, like most other defenders of human rights, I am among the half a million Burundians who have had to flee the country because of a regime that does not tolerate any dissent.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development of Canada's House of Commons for its sustained interest in the political crisis in my country since April 2015. We must always remember that this crisis is the result of President Pierre Nkurunziza's desire to secure a third term of office, in violation of the Burundian constitution of March 2015 and the Arusha peace and reconciliation agreement for Burundi of August 28, 2000. We have always greatly appreciated the subcommittee's reports and recommendations. Holding new debates and meetings about the situation in Burundi keeps the country on the international community's agenda, at a time when the authorities in Burundi are trying to bury the crisis and keep saying that "everything is fine".

There have been no improvements in the situation in Burundi since April 2015. On the contrary, it keeps deteriorating and there is no solution on the horizon at this time.

With respect to security, there has been a calm period in the country since the gunfire stopped in the city of Bujumbura. The streets of the capital are no longer littered with dead bodies as they were at the start of the crisis. That said, many people, primarily opponents of President Nkurunziza's regime, keep disappearing, without the slightest police or judicial investigation of these disappearances.

What has changed, however, is the modus operandi of the crimes: operations to abduct citizens have become more discrete; extra-judicial executions are committed in secret; and bodies are thrown into lakes or graves guarded by Imbonerakure militiamen. A general climate of fear reigns among the population, which is controlled by the Imbonerakure militia, who have nearly all police powers, and who also commit many acts of violence.

There is still a risk of civil war. A number of attacks in northwestern Burundi have been reported recently, with the RED-Tabara movement taking credit.

Politically, the Burundian authorities are keeping the political space closed. The main civil society organizations are still banned, as are most independent media.

Last May, President Nkurunziza had a new constitution adopted by referendum which makes it possible for him to override a number of inconvenient provisions of the Arusha Accord. Although he announced that he will not be a candidate in 2020, there is nothing stopping him from seeking two more terms of office and remaining in power until 2034. The new constitution allows him to establish a monarchy. With a view to evading potential proceedings of the International Criminal Court, he made sure that this convention stipulates that no Burundian person may be extradited. As Mr. Armel said, this constitution was adopted in a climate of terror and without any independent international observation.

As to human rights, serious violations are ongoing, as noted in the latest report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi. This report mentions possible crimes against humanity, including murders, extrajudicial executions, torture, rape of women, and enforced disappearances.

● (1320)

In addition to these serious violations, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi condemned hate speech from the country's most senior officials, including President Pierre Nkurunziza.

True to form, Burundi's authorities responded by denying the claims and hurling insults. They threatened to withdraw from the UN Human Rights Council, saying the UN experts were not welcome and calling the commission's chair the son of a slave trader. After the commission of inquiry submitted its first report in September 2017, Burundi withdrew from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Socio-economically, Burundi's economy is in shambles and its people live in unspeakable poverty. Despite that, Pierre Nkurunziza's regime clings to power, thanks mainly to the money it receives from its peacekeeping missions in Somalia and the Central African Republic. These missions have made it possible for the regime to encourage, and build support among, the most zealous elements of the repression, access the money to pay the Imbonerakure militia and limit fluctuations in Burundi's currency. It is quite the paradox: peacekeeping missions are helping to stabilize other countries while strengthening Burundi's bloody dictatorship.

In those difficult conditions, human rights organizations are continuing to document human rights violations. Most work in exile but have built very good relationships with the people and rely on observer networks that have been in place for years. The work of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi and the investigation of the International Criminal Court are based mainly on the documentation provided by human rights organizations, which are in need of greater international support.

For instance, my organization, the FOCODE, has been documenting enforced disappearance cases since April 2016. Before we got involved, the narrative on the current repression in Burundi was practically silent on the issue of enforced disappearances. Families would tell us that loved ones had been arrested by elements in the security forces but that they could not locate them in the official institutions. Paralyzed by fear and the possibility of reprisal, families opted not to speak out about the incidents, all the while faced with an agonizing dilemma. Should they keep looking for their loved one or assume they had been killed and mourn the loss?

On April 28, 2016, the FOCODE launched the Ndondeza campaign against enforced disappearances in Burundi. “Ndondeza” is a Kirundi word that means “help me find my loved one”. Since then, the FOCODE has documented 91 disappearances out of approximately 300 cases submitted by families looking for their loved ones. We regularly post the cases we have identified on our website, and we indicate the person's name as well as the circumstances surrounding their disappearance.

Our research shows that most of the victims are people who protested against Pierre Nkurunziza's third term, opposition party supporters, members of the former army or former rebel movements deemed to be opponents of the current regime, human rights advocates such as journalists and civil society activists and, in rare cases, Imbonerakure militia members who could testify to crimes committed by the regime. The forces involved in the disappearances are most often the national intelligence service, in other words, Burundi's secret service, the national police, the army and the Imbonerakure militia. Unfortunately, Burundi's authorities never comment on the cases of citizens who have disappeared.

Given this bleak situation, it's natural to wonder what can be done about the crisis. What can Canada do to help?

First of all, it is crucial that Burundi remain on the international community's agenda. Canada will soon become a member of the UN Security Council, and we expect it to urge the council to keep up pressure on Burundi's authorities.

• (1325)

Second of all, the solution to the crisis in Burundi inevitably lies in the various political players coming together for genuine talks. The Burundi government boycotted the fifth round of the inter-Burundi dialogue, as Mr. Armel mentioned, and, over the past three years, the East African Co-operation has basically failed to bring the government and opposition to the same table. The UN and the African Union need to lead the dialogue process, and meaningful action needs to be taken against any player that thwarts the dialogue.

On that note, I'd like to underscore something. One of the recommendations in your recent report is to take targeted sanctions against certain Burundian officials, mainly by imposing a travel ban and freezing their assets.

Third, the 2000 Arusha accord must underpin the solution to the crisis, and Pierre Nkurunziza's new constitution must be rejected.

Fourth, getting the country back on track hinges on such key elements as the dissolution of the Imbonerakure militia, the protection of exiled leaders, the reinstatement of civil liberties,

including for independent media and civil society, the reform of security and defence forces, and refugee repatriation.

Fifth, the solution to the crisis in Burundi must not include impunity for international crimes. It must ensure that the current International Criminal Court process is respected and that an independent judicial system equipped to prosecute perpetrators of serious crimes in Burundi is established.

I see I'm going to run out of time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Nininahazwe. I'm sorry, but you've been talking for 12 minutes already.

[*English*]

We'll start our questions with Mr. Reid, for seven minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you very much to both of our witnesses.

I'll start with our first witness.

There may have been a translation issue, but at one point I thought you said that the incidents of violence were escalating. However, I also heard what sounded like they were at a steady state. Can I get confirmation? Has there been an escalation in the level of violence in the past six months to a year?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): That would be for Armel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Armel Niyongere: Thank you for the question.

Indeed, there has been an escalation in human rights violations in Burundi, according to the data we have for the period from January to October 2018.

I also mentioned the hate speech coming from the country's top officials, not the least of whom is the president of the republic, Pierre Nkurunziza. The Speaker of the Senate has also made remarks, and videos circulate of the Imbonerakure singing songs proclaiming they will commit crimes against opponents should an election be held in 2020. It is clear that the Imbonerakure militia, the country's top-ranking authorities and the national intelligence service are getting organized. Yes, human rights violations are up.

Something else I mentioned was the recent report released by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi. The report indicated that crimes against humanity are being committed in Burundi.

The hate speech coming from the country's top officials, the songs sung by members of the the Imbonerakure militia, all of those things are evidence that something is in the works. We are calling on the international community, including the Canadian government, to act swiftly to protect Burundi's people.

• (1330)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Mr. Nininahazwe, you have a website on which you have an index of people who are the victims of forced disappearance. First, could you repeat to us the website address?

Second, you have 91 individuals recorded out of roughly 300 that you know of. Could you tell us over what time period the 300 disappearances have taken place? Is that over the entire three-year period since 2015, or is it over a shorter period?

[Translation]

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe: Thank you for the question.

The website for the Ndondeza campaign against enforced disappearances in Burundi is www.ndondeza.org. There, you will find the cases we've documented.

The purpose of the campaign isn't so much to compile statistics. The goal is actually to put a face to victims, to identify them, to retrace what happened between when they were arrested and when their family realized they had disappeared. It's a big job. We systematically investigate everything that happened from the time the person was arrested.

Although we've documented 91 cases, more than 300 families have asked us to look into their case since April 2016. International organizations, among others, estimate that between 300 and 900 people have disappeared since April 2015. From our investigations, we have seen the number of enforced disappearances go up in 2018.

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid: Do you believe that keeping this kind of detailed record of specific incidents could serve as an incentive to people who might engage in this kind of human rights abuse to not do so because they face future potential punishment?

Could it have that role?

[Translation]

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe: Yes, absolutely.

We've already heard from the national police force and the national intelligence service that agents of the state are refusing to participate in these crimes out of fear the Ndondeza campaign will expose them.

We are also seeing growing secrecy around abduction activities in 2018. In the three years prior, members of the national police or national intelligence service would go to people's homes to arrest them, in front of their families, out in the open, and then they would disappear. In 2018, however, they began taking a more sophisticated approach. What they are doing now is asking a friend of the victim to call them up to arrange a meeting, usually in a strange place. The next thing the family knows is that their loved one has been arrested and has disappeared unbeknownst to them. That means agents of the state are becoming worried about what we're doing through the Ndondeza campaign.

•(1335)

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

That's the end of the seven minutes.

We'll go to Mr. Tabbara for another seven minutes.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Picard, did you want to go first?

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Go ahead, and I'll finish it if there's still some time.

[Translation]

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I'd like to thank the witnesses for their presentations.

[English]

My first question will be for the first witness, Armel.

In your testimony, you talked about human rights violations and kidnappings. I wanted to ask you about the role of the AU, the African Union.

Have they had a vital role within Burundi in helping alleviate some of these human rights abuses?

[Translation]

Mr. Armel Niyongere: The African Union hasn't done anything about the crimes being committed in Burundi since the crisis began. It has had observers there since the beginning, but I don't believe they've produced any reports on the human rights violations. As far as I know, they aren't permitted to visit secret locations or meet with national intelligence service officers to record arrests and arbitrary detentions. I don't think the African Union has the power or the will to investigate the human rights violations.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Nininahazwe.

[English]

My question would be on the role of the media. Have they been heavily influenced by the regime? Have individuals been imprisoned for broadcasting certain information that maybe the regime didn't find favourable? Can you speak to the role of the media in Burundi a bit more?

[Translation]

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe: Thank you for the question.

Independent media have played a major role in the crisis. That explains why those in power have gone after the media, with state defence and security forces setting fire to independent radio stations.

Since the crisis began, many journalists have gone into exile. More than 60 are refugees. Most are in neighbouring countries. Despite being in exile, the members of the Burundian press have remained very active. The little bit of information the Burundian people do receive now comes mainly from two independent radio stations operating in exile. They are making a tremendous contribution.

In Burundi, Pierre Nkurunziza's regime continues to target and crack down on journalists. Every so often, we see that yet another journalist has fled Burundi because they dared to investigate a difficult matter or write an editorial that didn't please those in power. Most of the journalists who stayed in the country are very hesitant to openly condemn the serious human rights violations going on. The online newspaper *Iwacu*, which is struggling more and more, is having major trouble operating and continues to come under pressure from the regime.

• (1340)

The Chair: Mr. Picard, your turn.

Mr. Michel Picard: Good afternoon. My name is Michel Picard. My colleague gave me the rest of his time so I could ask you questions.

Mr. Niyongere, how likely is it that international intervention would lead to retaliation and therefore more severe consequences for Burundi's people?

Mr. Armel Niyongere: Could you please repeat the question?

Mr. Michel Picard: How likely is it that international intervention could lead to even worse acts of reprisal against the people, because it would be seen as outside interference?

Mr. Armel Niyongere: Actually, I think the international community should try to stop the worst from happening, particularly in regard to the peacekeeping missions in Somalia and the Central African Republic. The international community should cease or suspend the missions because the money they generate is being used to pay the Imbonerakure militia to commit crimes and bully the population. The international community should really be taking swift measures to prevent the worst.

Mr. Michel Picard: My next question is for Mr. Nininahazwe.

I had a look at your website and saw that some of the people listed have ties to opposition parties. Many are identified simply by civil status.

Are they individuals who openly oppose the regime and suffer the consequences? Also, is there a practice of singling people out and getting rid of them as a precaution?

The Chair: You have just 20 seconds to answer, so I'll ask you to keep it brief, please.

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe: Thank you.

Most of the victims whose cases we've identified through the Ndondeza campaign are opposition activists, usually members of the MSD party or Agathon Rwaswa's FNL party. Most of them protested against President Nkurunziza's third term, in the city of Bujumbura and other parts of the country.

We have also observed that a very small number of CNDD-FDD and Imbonerakure members were the victims of enforced disappearances. These are individuals who were involved in extremely serious crimes. We believe they were eliminated so they wouldn't be able to testify to serious crimes perpetrated by the regime before the International Criminal Court.

For the most part, the victims are regime opponents, but they can be members of the ruling party.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

We'll have the next question from Ms. Hardcastle. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you very much, gentlemen.

I am going to be asking you both about the reform of defence authorities and what you think should happen.

I will start with Mr. Niyongere, please.

The Chair: I hear the interpretation now, but I believe we have lost Mr. Niyongere.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

We are having some technical difficulty, so we can't hear Mr. Niyongere.

In that case, Mr. Nininahazwe can answer first.

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe: I'll answer in Mr. Niyongere's place.

The Arusha accord provided for the creation of defence and security forces [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. Some of those security and defence forces are being ethnically radicalized, particularly the national intelligence service, which is the primary force used in the repression and is made up almost entirely of Hutus.

There are also concerns as far as the army and police go. The Arusha accord established the ethnic makeup of the two security forces, but we worry that it isn't being adhered to, especially since many members of the military and police who belonged to the former, predominantly Tutsi, army have disappeared or been murdered. A number of them have fled.

The reform of defence forces in Burundi should still be consistent with the Arusha accord. We'll have to see to what extent exiled military members are accepted back into Burundi's security forces, in order to break the cycle of violence. That's what will happen if they remain out there and are not integrated into the defence and security forces.

The Chair: Mr. Niyongere, did you have anything to add?

Mr. Armel Niyongere: I did not hear the question.

The Chair: Can you repeat the question, Ms. Hardcastle?

[*English*]

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Yes. I wanted to hear about some of the ways that Burundi could reform its authorities, its defence authorities in particular.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Armel Niyongere: When it comes to the defence reform, I think it is much more a matter of the army and other security services.

First, the authorities must align themselves with what was set out in the Arusha agreement in order to reassure all Burundians, given that those security forces have always been used to murder part of the Burundian population.

Second, it should be pointed out that many military members and police officers are currently in exile. Rebel movements are starting to form, but they're not even invited to participate in the dialogue on the Arusha agreement. It is important for the defence reform to integrate those elements that are now outside the country and will continue to disrupt Burundi's security if they are not integrated.

Third, training must be organized to have a professional army and police force that truly serve Burundians.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think we'll go to a second round, but we'll keep it very short, to three minutes per person.

We will begin with Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to follow on Ms. Hardcastle's questioning. This was hinted at, perhaps, in the question about the defence forces and the answer on ethnic politics that was given, but I'd like to delve into that further. In what way is ethnic identity being politicized at the current moment by ruling authorities? What are the implications of that, if it is indeed being politicized?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe: Thank you for your question.

It seems to us more and more that defence forces and security forces are politicized. A number of generals from the old CNDD-FDD rebellion are the real leaders of the party in power. When we list those in charge and those who really have power in Burundi, after Nkurunziza, there are always a number of CNDD-FDD generals who are deciding on the fate of Burundians today.

It is also wrong that only Hutus are at the most senior levels of the national military and police, but there aren't any members of Burundi's former army and former police. That is a serious violation of the Arusha agreement, concluded in 2000.

Moreover, the party in power today is led by a CNDD-FDD general, and we feel that CNDD-FDD military members and generals continue to heavily influence the Burundian population. As long as Burundi's politicians remain militarized, we will live in fear of a crisis situation, like we did during the era of military coups we thought was gone.

● (1350)

Mr. Armel Niyongere: To complement Mr. Nininahazwe's comments, I must say that defence and security forces are indeed politicized in Burundi. Recently, there was a three-month temporary suspension of international NGOs. That suspension was instituted by an advisory body, the National Security Council, which is made up of generals and chaired by the president of the republic, Pierre Nkurunziza. That body could not institute such a measure, but since it is made up of generals and former CNDD-FDD military members,

it supplants an executive body. So we are seeing that the Burundian regime is a military regime. Military and security forces are politicized.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Sorenson, you have three minutes.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: I'm Kevin Sorenson, and I'm a member of Parliament from the western part of Canada.

I want to thank you for your testimony today and for what you do, fighting for freedom and human rights in a very dangerous place.

I have a couple of comments and maybe a question or two.

In Burundi, as in many such countries, it's almost like, if you control the military, you control the country. I have a colleague who spent some time in Burundi. The use of child soldiers was occurring in Burundi at the time. He met a young 12-year-old soldier whom he said had the most blank look you could ever imagine in a human being, and that young soldier admitted to killing over 25 people. I'm not sure, first of all, if this is still happening with child soldiers, but at that time, it was.

In regard to the economy of Burundi, some of our notes show that 400,000 people have been displaced, and I think the number you used was 500,000 people. That obviously disrupts the economy. I know that Germany, Pakistan and others are larger trading partners with Burundi than Canada is. We're about seventh on the list. As far as the economy goes, when you have people displaced, that is bad, but it can also be a real negative when they come back because they're returning without a job to go to and without a bank account.

I'm wondering if you can tell us a little bit about their state when they return. Are they coming back willingly? Are these part of the international arrests that they're promoting? If you could give the committee a bit of an idea in regard to the displacement and how some of the countries around... Are they responding in alliance with Burundi, or are they recognizing the problems there and backing off on that?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You each have 30 seconds to answer.

Mr. Niyongere, go ahead.

● (1355)

Mr. Armel Niyongere: Currently, Burundian refugees who are in countries bordering the region—for example, in Tanzania—are very threatened. Sometimes, they are forcibly sent back to the country without their consent.

That is why we are asking Canada to support the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees in its work with host countries to guarantee the civilian security of Burundian refugees. I am here referring to refugees in Tanzania, who are threatened and send us messages every day to alert us. So we are sounding the alarm and asking Canada and the rest of the international community to help the HRC in its attempt to guarantee the civilian security of Burundian refugees.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

We will now give Mr. Nininahazwe an opportunity to answer.

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe: The issue of child soldiers was not a concern back then, but today, we are very worried by the hate-based education targeting children at a young age, in elementary school. Those children are singing the Imbonerakure hate chants. It should also be pointed out that, in the case of the Imbonerakure militia, it is sometimes difficult to figure out whether they are still children or are already adults because that education is provided to all young people, in the hills, without necessarily distinguishing in terms of age.

As for displaced individuals, we separate them into two categories. On the one hand, there are internally displaced people, who are still in Burundi and have been there since 1993. Those are primarily Tutsis. On the other hand, there are refugees outside Burundi. People from those two categories are all threatened. Those who are in Burundi are already seriously threatened. The CNDD-FDD party, which is in power, and the Imbonerakure militia are threatening to destroy the camps where internally displaced people have been refugees since 1993. The safety of refugees outside the country is also seriously threatened. That is the case for refugees in Tanzania. They are being forced to return to Burundi. In addition, nearly all Burundian refugees who are in bordering countries are living under highly precarious conditions because the HCR does not have sufficient financial means. So we are calling on Canada to provide support to the HCR with regard to this situation.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

I am sorry, but Ms. Hardcastle has only three minutes left.

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Thank you again.

Could ethnic tension be a factor as well in why there is inactivity or ineffectualness from regional organizations like the East African Community or the African Union?

[Translation]

Mr. Armel Niyongere: I think that the leaders and presidents who are part of the East African Community do not see the Burundian crisis and its potential outcome in the same way. That is why the dialogue has not advanced over the past three years. Some countries support President Pierre Nkurunziza. So we are asking that the

dialogue be extended across Africa, the African Union or the United Nations, as we have already noted that people from the community do not have the same point of view or the same willingness to find a solution to bring Burundi out of this crisis.

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe: As Mr. Niyongere was saying, certain regional aspect have to be considered in the ongoing crisis in Burundi. We already see that Interahamwe militia who participated in the Rwanda genocide are currently in Burundi. Very recently, attacks in Rwanda originating in Burundi have been reported. So it is to be feared that this crisis, if it is not resolved quickly, may affect the entire Great Lakes sub-region. We are also starting to see attacks by Burundian rebels from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As Mr. Niyongere was saying, the region's leaders have different perceptions of the Burundian crisis. Some are trying to make it look like an ethnic issue, but that is not the case. In reality, the current crisis has nothing to do with the previous ethnic crises in Burundi. This is a political crisis stemming from Pierre Nkurunziza's desire to hold on to power. Both the opposition and the current regime are made up of Hutus and Tutsis. So it is false to believe that this is an ethnic crisis. However, some countries in the region are looking at it that way.

• (1400)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Unfortunately, we have only one hour for the meeting.

Mr. Niyongere and Mr. Nininahazwe, thank you for your testimony and your courage.

[English]

Thank you very much also to the interpreters who have done a phenomenal job today under trying circumstances.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe: Thank you for your commitment, ladies and gentlemen. We thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Just a reminder to the committee, there's no meeting on Thursday.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>