

BURUNDI

URGENT: Stop to forced repatriation of Burundian refugees from Tanzania

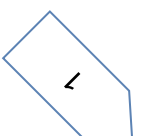
Tanzania Ultimatum to Burundi Refugees for forced repatriation by December 2024 : Imminent danger for Burundian refugees, the international community must act !

May 28, 2024



The Burundian civil society organizations signatories to this Declaration are deeply concerned by the humanitarian crisis affecting Burundian refugees in Tanzania. This situation, which has persisted and worsened since the end of 2019, should be of major concern to all those committed to human rights values.

Forced to flee their home country, Burundi, due to violence and instability stemming from the 2015 crisis, these refugees found refuge in Tanzania. However, far from being a safe haven, this host country has become the scene of a series of atrocities perpetrated by the police and intelligence forces of Burundi and Tanzania. Operations carried out by night



have been source of forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture, turning refugee camps into places of terror rather than security.

The reports from NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch, are damning. Credible sources reveal that these heinous practices affected at least 18 identifiable people, although the true number is likely higher. Arrests and disappearances of Burundian refugees often occur in obscure and terrifying conditions, without arrest warrants, exacerbating anxiety and terror among refugee populations. These actions constitute flagrant violations of human rights, causing indescribable sufferings not only for the detainees but also their families who remain without news. Detainees, accused without evidence of guilt, undergo brutal interrogations and are forced to live in degrading conditions, marked by torture of all kinds, including electric shocks, burns with chili peppers and other serious physical abuses.

The Statement issued in 2020 by the Inspector General of the Tanzanian Police Mr. Simon NYOKORO SIRRO, announcing his intention to “cleanse” the refugee camps of “undesirable Burundian elements”, exacerbated this violence. This policy was illustrated in a horrifying manner by killings and the discovery of lifeless bodies in 2021 and again recently in 2024. These acts of violence are symptoms of a profound humanitarian crisis and a flagrant violation of human rights.

In order to make life impossible for them and force them to return to Burundi, the Tanzanian authorities spared no effort to achieve this despicable objective. They cut off all sources of subsistence: they destroyed refugees' farming fields, the closure of small business stands, the confiscation of their motorcycles, severe restrictions on all movement, the closure of schools and healthcare facilities. Women and children are particularly vulnerable, exposed to sexual violence and other forms of physical and psychological violence.

We would like to highlight the discriminatory measures taken specifically against Burundian refugees, which clearly demonstrate that they are being forcibly repatriated. For example, in Nyarugusu, the agricultural activities of the Congolese continue normally, while the Burundians are prohibited from these same activities. This shows blatant discrimination and pressure put on Burundians to leave.

The ultimatum issued by the Tanzanian government for the forced repatriation of refugees by December 2024 constitutes another violation of the principles of non-refoulement and refugee protection set out in international conventions. The principle of non-refoulement is the cornerstone of the international refugee law, which prohibits returning people to a country where they risk persecution. By imposing forced repatriation, Tanzania is ignoring this principle and endangering the lives of thousands of Burundian refugees. This measure, which is part of a policy of constant pressure, clearly aims to make the lives of refugees unbearable in order to force them to return to their country of origin, where they face serious risks and systematic violence.

Since the President Ndayishimiye took office in 2020, Burundian refugees placed their hope in a possible improvement in the situation, which encouraged some to return. However, many of those who returned faced various difficulties, including assassinations, kidnappings and some had to flee the country again. Below are some concrete examples to illustrate the seriousness of the situation:

- Mbarushimana Emmanuel from the province of Karusi-Buhiga, repatriated in 2020, killed in 2020;

- Ntwari René Pacifique from the province of Kirundo-Busoni/Kabanga, repatriated in 2020, killed in 2021;
- Harerimana Jean Pierre from Kayanza province, repatriated in 2020, killed in January 2021;
- Nyandwi Ferdinand, alias Kambayingwe, repatriated in 2021 and killed on November 26, 2022 in Kirundo by security forces and the Imbonerakure militia of the CNDD-FDD;
- Christophe Niyonzima from the province of Kirundo-Bugabira, arrested on August 23, 2021 at Masanganzira between Kirundo and Ngozi by the military intelligence service and cannot be found to date

These tragic cases show that the return of refugees to Burundi is far from being safe and that the risks of persecution remain high. Furthermore, the undersigned organizations vehemently denounce the behavior of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Tanzania, who seems to give in to the pressure of this repressive policy and participate into it instead of contributing to the mitigation of the suffering of refugees.

In conclusion, the signatory organizations to this declaration have taken note of the content of the recent Declaration published on May 22, 2024 on the UNHCR/Africa website, entitled "Declaration on voluntary returns of refugees from Tanzania to Burundi". However, the 19 signatory organizations express their concern about the reliability of the assurances given by the UNHCR in response to the Ultimatum issued by the President of the Republic of Tanzania, Her Excellency Madam Samia SULUHU, during a meeting of the High command of Tanzanian Defense Forces on January 22, 2024 in Dar es Salaam, the economic capital. As long as the refugees do not have any official assurance from the Presidency of the Republic, they will remain worried.

In Tanzania, even before this Ultimatum, Burundian refugees were regularly forcibly repatriated, a reality that UNHCR did not mention in its statement. This focused solely on the ultimatum of forced repatriation. However, these refugees repatriation takes place in conditions so much endangering the lives of refugees, that they reach the point where they rather prefer returning than die there.

In response to this inhuman and unbearable situation, we, the undersigned organizations, request the following:

To the Tanzanian Government:

- Guarantee the security and dignity of Burundian refugees. All coercive measures aimed at forcibly repatriating them must stop immediately. The Tanzanian government must respect international conventions on refugee rights, in particular the principle of non-refoulement, and ensure a safe and dignified environment for all refugees on its territory.

To the High Commission for Refugees in Tanzania to:

- Strictly comply with the law and defend, without complacency, the rights of Burundian refugees by resisting political influences.
- Guarantee resettlement in other countries for Burundian refugees who express the need, by creating a humanitarian corridor and ensuring dignified and secure conditions.

To the East African Community (EAC) to:

- Use all powers at its disposal to preserve the rights of its citizens by preventing Tanzania from violating the rights of Burundian refugees on its territory. The EAC must remind Tanzania of the fundamental principles of refugee rights, including the principle of non-refoulement, to ensure protection and respect of the rights of these vulnerable individuals in accordance with existing international and regional standards.

To the African Union (AU) to:

- Demand, through its Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, respect for the Kampala Convention relating to the protection and assistance of displaced persons in Africa. The AU must intervene to ensure that Tanzania respects its obligations towards displaced persons and refugees, by implementing the necessary measures to guarantee their protection and assistance in accordance with this Convention.

To the international community to:

- Exert decisive pressure on the Tanzanian government to immediately suspend the policy of forced repatriation of Burundian refugees planned for December 2024.
- Encourage the Tanzanian government to respect its international commitments, with the possibility of sanctioning those responsible for these abuses.

To countries and other organizations assisting refugees around the world to:

- Increase the aid needed for all refugees in the Great Lakes region in order to improve their living conditions and meet their minimum basic needs, because they are currently living in precarious conditions, unprecedented challenge requiring urgent support.

To NGOs and human rights organizations to:

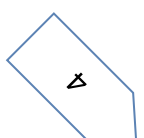
- Intensify monitoring by systematically documenting abuses and regularly publishing detailed reports on human rights violations against refugees.
- Continue to provide comprehensive and diversified humanitarian assistance to Burundian refugees, covering their basic needs such as food, water, medical care, education and housing, and working to improve their living conditions and general well-being.

To local and international media to:

- Maintain constant and in-depth coverage of the situation of Burundian refugees in Tanzania, in order to inform and alert national and international public opinion.
- Encourage an urgent, coordinated and effective international response to address this humanitarian crisis.

Signed on May 28, 2024

The 19 signatory organisations:



1. Action by Christians for the abolition of torture in Burundi (ACAT Burundi)
2. Association of Burundian Journalists in Exile (AJBE)
3. Burundian Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (APRODH)
4. Burundian Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (CBDDH)
5. Burundian coalition of human rights defenders living in refugee camps (CBDH/VICAR)
6. Burundian Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CB-ICC)
7. Civil society coalition for electoral monitoring (COSOME)
8. Collective of Lawyers for the Defense of Victims of Crimes under International Law Committed in Burundi (CAVIB)
9. Together to support human rights defenders in danger (ESDDH)
10. Forum for Consciousness and Development (FOCODE)
11. Forum for the Strengthening of Civil Society in Burundi (FORSC)
12. Light for all
13. ITEKA League
14. INAMAHORO Movement
15. Movement of Women and Girls for Peace and Security in Burundi (MFFPS)
16. Probe Citizens Network (RCP)
17. SOS Torture-Burundi
18. Let's turn the page-Burundi (TLP-Burundi)
19. Burundian Union of Journalists (UBJ)

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