

Resolution on Burundi, notably the freedom of expression

2020/2502(RSP) - 16/01/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Burundi, notably freedom of expression.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled as a joint resolution by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, ECR and GUE/NGL groups.

Deterioration of the human rights situation

Parliament recalled that the situation in Burundi remained worrying, with numerous reports of violations of fundamental civil rights and fundamental political freedoms.

The stalemate on reaching a political solution through the Inter-Burundi Dialogue severely threatens the holding of elections scheduled for May 2020. In its report of 4 September 2019, the UN Human Rights Council-mandated Commission of Inquiry on Burundi (COIB), highlighted that a few months ahead of the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections, fear and intimidation prevailed for those who opposed the ruling CNDD-FDD party.

Reporters Without Borders ranks Burundi 159th out of 180 in its 2019 World Press Freedom Index. In December 2019, Burundi's prosecutor general called for the sentencing to 15 years in prison of four journalists from the Iwacu press group, who were arrested while covering clashes between rebels and government forces in north-western Burundi. The Burundian National Communication Council also banned all Burundian journalists "from directly or indirectly providing information that could be broadcast by the BBC or the Voice of America VOA.

Furthermore, Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world: 4.7 % of its population lives in poverty, and it ranks 185th out of 189 on the development index. Chronic food insecurity, poverty, poor social services, high youth unemployment and lack of opportunities remain sources of violence in the country.

Condemnation of human rights violations

Recalling that Burundi was bound by the human rights clause of the Cotonou Agreement, Parliament strongly condemned the current restrictions on freedom of expression in Burundi, as well as the large-scale human rights violations, intimidation and arbitrary arrests of journalists and broadcasting bans that have prevented adequate media coverage, particularly in view of the 2020 elections. It expressed concern about the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in the country, particularly with regard to opposition supporters, which undermines any initiative for reconciliation, peace and justice.

The resolution stressed that a significant improvement in the political and human rights situation is essential for the credibility of the elections.

The Burundian authorities were invited to:

- drop the charges against the recently imprisoned journalists from Iwacu and to allow human rights activists and journalists to freely exercise their legitimate task of investigating and reporting human rights violations;

- put an end to abuses against citizens and to ensure that no one is prevented from accessing public goods and services such as health care, food, water or education, as well as to allow humanitarian actors to operate independently and provide assistance under the obligation to meet the most urgent needs;
- conduct thorough and transparent investigations with a view to bringing to justice in fair and credible trials all alleged perpetrators of killings, disappearances, abuses or other forms of abuse.

Parliament called for the EU's targeted sanctions to be extended and called on the UN Security Council to impose its own targeted sanctions, including a travel ban and assets freeze, against those responsible for continuing serious human rights violations in Burundi.

Member States of the European Union were invited to:

- provide financial assistance to civil society organisations and media organisations, including women's organisations, still working on the ground, but also to those in exile, in particular those working for the promotion and protection of political, civil, economic and social rights and media rights;
- grant refugee status to asylum-seekers from Burundi and to closely monitor the situation in the country with a view to the elections in 2020.

Resuming dialogue

Parliament recalled that an inclusive political dialogue, in the framework of international mediation and in compliance with the Arusha Agreement and the Constitution of Burundi, remained the only way to ensure lasting peace in Burundi. It called on the East African Community (EAC), the key convener of the inter-Burundian dialogue, to take the necessary steps to engage the Government of Burundi without delay in an open dialogue for a lasting peaceful solution to the current crisis.