

For Immediate Release

Burundi: Abductions, Killings Spread Fear

UN Security Council Should Press for Deployment of International Police Presence

(Nairobi, February 25, 2016) – The Burundian authorities are targeting perceived opponents with increased brutality, Human Rights Watch said today. Government forces are killing, abducting, torturing, and arbitrarily arresting scores of people at an alarming rate.

As the capital, Bujumbura, descends into new levels of lawlessness, patterns of human rights abuses have shifted. Whereas dead bodies on the streets of Bujumbura were a daily occurrence in the second half of 2015, many abuses are now taking place under the radar, with security forces secretly taking people away and refusing to account for them.

“The Burundian police, military, intelligence services, and members of the ruling party’s youth league are using increasingly brutal methods to punish and terrorize perceived opponents,” said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Government forces and the ruling party are treating suspected opponents with extreme cruelty and viciousness, which could further escalate the violence.”

Security forces have tortured or ill-treated suspected opponents so severely during arrests or in detention that some almost died. Security forces beat victims with rocks, bricks, gun butts, or metal rods. Most of those arrested are young men accused of participating in or supporting armed opposition groups.

Human Rights Watch researchers interviewed more than 63 people in Bujumbura between November 2015 and February 2016, including victims, their relatives, witnesses, residents of areas where abuses occurred, human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, judicial and security force officials, diplomats, United Nations staff, and other sources.

Human Rights Watch sought meetings with Burundian government officials while in Bujumbura but did not receive a response. On February 18, the president’s communications advisor, Willy Nyamitwe, sent the following Twitter message to Human Rights Watch: “I have strong evidences (sic) that HRW is working with Rwanda and radical opposition. In that case, there is no need to talk to them.”

Human Rights Watch researchers in Burundi have documented an alarming new pattern of abductions and possible disappearances, particularly since December. Many families have not been able to get news of their relatives since security forces led them away. Many of those arrested are presumed dead. The police and intelligence services, or their intermediaries, have asked some families for exorbitant ransoms, with no guarantee that their relatives will be released and no certainty that they are alive.

Police and military, often accompanied by members of the ruling party youth league known as *Imbonerakure*, have carried out large-scale arbitrary arrests during search operations. These operations have also resulted in numerous extrajudicial killings. Many residents have moved out

of their neighborhoods, in anticipation of further police or military operations.

In some cases, people were killed outright and their bodies left at the scene. This was the case, for example, on December 11, 2015, when the security forces shot dead a large number of people following attacks on four military installations that were attributed to the opposition. The military spokesperson said 87 people were killed on December 11, 79 “enemies” and eight military or police. Based on extensive interviews with a range of sources, Human Rights Watch believes the real number is much higher and that many victims were not involved in the attacks. In other incidents, victims’ bodies were dumped elsewhere, buried in mass graves, or taken to unknown destinations.

Other people survived extremely violent attacks with horrific injuries – mutilations, smashed bones, slit throats, attempted strangulation, and beatings with iron bars. Some have since died, while others left for dead survived.

Victims and witnesses of abuses are terrified to speak or move around town. Their fear has been heightened by the knowledge that people have denounced each other to the security forces. The government’s tactics have spread distrust among the population.

Armed opposition groups have also increased their attacks, killing *Imbonerakure* and other ruling party members, as well as security forces. These attacks almost always lead to violent reprisals by the security forces, Human Rights Watch said.

Human Rights Watch documented cases of recruitment and military training of Burundian refugees in Rwanda, to join Burundian opposition groups, between May and July 2015. They were recruited by Burundian refugees and trained by Burundians and Rwandans. In a February 22, 2016 [letter](#) to Human Rights Watch, the permanent secretary in the Rwandan Ministry of Justice said that the Rwandan government “has heard of some broad allegations of insecurity among Burundian refugees” and “is intrigued by these accounts and seeks information that may be useful in carrying out investigations.”

“Attacks by opposition groups have become increasingly targeted, aimed at members or sympathizers of the ruling party and the security forces,” said Bekele. “Contrary to their leaders’ statements that they want to defend the population, their tactics are putting ordinary Burundians at risk of further abuses.”

There have been frequent grenade attacks in Bujumbura, including the center of town, throughout January 2015 and February 2016, causing several deaths and scores of injuries. The identity of the perpetrators is not known. Médecins Sans Frontières stated that their trauma center in Bujumbura had treated 116 people in less than a week – 61 injured in grenade attacks on February 15, and 55 on February 11.

Bujumbura residents told Human Rights Watch that there was not even a pretense of law and order anymore. They said the security forces’ behavior indicated that the chain of command was breaking down and the police, military and *Imbonerakure* did whatever they wanted with complete impunity. “There are no more rules and no one cares,” one woman said.

Bujumbura residents said they often saw *Imbonerakure* wearing police or military uniforms, carrying weapons and operating side by side with the police, making it difficult to distinguish them from the regular security forces. Some residents told Human Rights Watch they recognized *Imbonerakure* from their area wearing police uniforms.

Neither the Burundian government nor the armed opposition is doing anything to halt the spiral of abuses, Human Rights Watch found. They are instead hardening their stance, knowing that they will not have to account for their actions.

President Pierre Nkurunziza should publicly denounce security force abuses and ensure that those responsible are held to account, Human Rights Watch said. Opposition leaders should also order their supporters to stop abuses. The Rwandan government should not allow, support, or participate in military training for armed groups responsible for human rights abuses in Burundi.

The Burundian government should grant full access to two UN special rapporteurs and a member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, to investigate abuses in Burundi. As a Human Rights Council member, Burundi has an obligation to cooperate with the council's representatives and to uphold the highest human rights standards. Failure to do so would put its membership status in jeopardy.

The UN Security Council should urgently seek the Burundian government's consent for the deployment of a strong UN political mission with a substantial international police component, to be based in neighborhoods most affected by the violence. Its presence could deter or decrease abuses and attacks by both sides.

Given reports of the involvement of senior police, military, and intelligence commanders in serious abuses in Burundi, the UN should redouble efforts to vet Burundian personnel deployed in peacekeeping missions and exclude those with a known record of human rights abuses. The African Union should also urgently institute a vetting mechanism.

“With victims of abuse in Burundi paralyzed by fear, the cases that have come to light are just the tip of the iceberg,” Bekele said. “The government and the opposition should immediately rein in their members and supporters to break the cycle of violence.”

For more details, please see below.

For more Human Rights Watch reporting on Burundi, please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/burundi>

For more information, please contact:

In New York, Carina Tertsakian (English, French): +44-7903-503-297 (mobile); or tertsac@hrw.org

In New York, Daniel Bekele (English, Amharic): +1-917-385-3878 (mobile); or bekeled@hrw.org. Twitter: @DanielBekele

In New York, Philippe Bolopion (French, English): +1-212-216-1276; or +1-917-734-3201

(mobile); or bolopion@hrw.org. Twitter: @Bolopion

In New York until February 26, then in Paris, Bénédicte Jeannerod (French, English): +33-6-74-32-88-94 (mobile); or +33-1-43-59-55-31 (Paris office); or jeanneb@hrw.org. Twitter: @BenJeannerod

The Backdrop to Burundi's Crisis

The current political and human rights crisis in Burundi began in April 2015, when President Nkurunziza announced his candidacy for a third term – a move seen as illegitimate by many Burundians. The police [violently repressed widespread public demonstrations](#) against Nkurunziza's third term. After a failed coup led by a group of military officers on May 13, police cracked down further on protesters and critics. In the following months, [targeted assassinations and other killings escalated](#), and the government intensified its crackdown. Armed opposition groups began attacking security forces, throwing grenades or shooting at police patrols. By December, several hundred people had been killed and regional leaders' attempts at facilitating political dialogue had essentially failed.

In contrast with Burundi's armed conflicts in previous decades, which were largely fought along ethnic lines, the current tensions in Burundi are primarily political, with the government targeting anyone suspected of opposing it. Victims of abuses include members of the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. However, in some cases, members of the security forces, intelligence services, or *Imbonerakure* have hurled ethnic insults at Tutsi as they arrested, or ill-treated them. While there are many Tutsi in the government, many of the powerful positions in the ruling party and the security forces are held by Hutu. The government seeks to portray the opposition as predominantly Tutsi, even though it includes many Hutu.

While most national institutions include both Hutu and Tutsi, the current crisis is making some members of each group distrustful of one another. This has been exacerbated by inflammatory rhetoric by some ruling party members and opposition figures.

Recent Killings, Other Attacks

Events of December 11

At about 3 or 4 a.m., on December 11, 2015, Bujumbura residents heard explosions and gunfire from three military positions and a military training center that had been attacked in Musaga neighborhood.

Beginning at about 8 a.m., police and military pursued the alleged attackers into Nyakabiga and Musaga, two of the neighborhoods where there were strong demonstrations against Nkurunziza's third term. In Nyakabiga, armed opponents engaged the security forces in a sustained gun battle. It is unclear how many armed opponents, and how many members of the security forces or *Imbonerakure*, were killed in the fighting.

A source told Human Rights Watch that security forces arrested five soldiers from Camp Base (a military camp) who were suspected of involvement in the attacks. According to this source, a senior intelligence official then issued a detention order, and an intelligence services vehicle

picked up the five soldiers and took them to an area near Lake Tanganyika, where they were killed. A witness saw their bodies the next day near the lake, all five with their throats cut.

After the armed clashes, a combination of different security force units, including the police and military responsible for guarding state institutions (*Appui pour la protection des institutions*, API, and *Brigade spéciale pour la protection des institutions*, BSPI), and the police anti-riot brigade (*Brigade anti-émeute*, BAE), accompanied by armed *Imbonerakure*, entered Nyakabiga and Musaga. They forced their way into houses and ordered residents to show them where young men or combatants were hiding. Some of them shouted ethnic slurs and insults against Tutsi residents.

Some residents said the security forces demanded money. Other residents offered money, hoping they wouldn't be killed. Police and military looted many homes, stealing phones, clothes, electronics, and household goods. They looted beer from local bars, drinking some of it on the spot.

A man from Nyakabiga told Human Rights Watch that police shot a visiting relative as he left his compound.

At around 11 a.m., it was a bit calmer on our street and (a relative) who had come to visit us went outside. When he was just in front of the gate, an API policeman, who was on the Avenue de l'Imprimerie, shot him. Some young men saw that he'd been hit and carried him to the 16th Avenue. They stopped the bleeding and left him there. He'd been hit in the stomach. Later, police came and finished him off.

The man said the police shot his relative twice in the chest and once in the head.

Human Rights Watch viewed photos of 15 bodies found in Nyakabiga on December 11. Many were found on the street, without their shoes – security forces often make detainees remove their shoes at the time of arrest to make it harder for them to flee. Some were side by side, face down, and appeared to have been shot in the back. One of those found in this position was Benoit Ngendakumana, a teacher in his 30s. Another photo showed the body of a man who had been killed in his house; a local resident said he had been tied up, shot, and locked inside. Another was of a man killed in his shop.

Local government trucks removed most of the bodies before any investigation could be conducted.

Police and intelligence agents went door-to-door, arbitrarily arresting young men. A 30-year-old man from Nyakabiga said that when his wife opened the door, a policeman hit her with the butt of his gun and hit him in the eye with a pistol. The police forced the couple to sit on the ground in the courtyard.

One of the policemen shouted at us: “You house and feed the combatants! Let Kagame (the President of Rwanda), Obama, and the African Union come and save you. The white people are lying to you, just like (Alexis) Sinduhije (an opposition leader). You are Tutsi

terrorists. (Nkurunziza) is president for life. Nobody can fight those in power.” We were around 20 (in the courtyard) and only one policeman was shouting bad things at us. The others were drinking what they had stolen from the bar in our house. They beat everyone there.

A witness said that in one house, police picked two men from a group of six and drove them away in an intelligence services truck. Their bodies were found with their arms bound the next day, both shot in the head and the neck.

One resident saw 20 bodies in Nyakabiga the day after the attack; another counted 22. Another resident said there were 29, a few of whom were from other neighborhoods. Witnesses said they saw 12 bodies in Jabe.

One case in particular shows the brutality by the security forces on December 11. A 31-year-old man from Nyakabiga said that anti-riot police tied his arms behind his back and took him to see their commander, who has been accused of numerous human rights abuses for several years. The man said:

The police said: “Here is one of the youth who shot at us.” They hit me with clubs, kicked me, and slapped me, saying, “These youth are dogs.” Then (the commander) asked me: “Where are the combatants?” I said I didn’t see them. (The commander) said: “Take him over there and strangle him.”

Two policemen took him to an empty house.

One of them took off the rope around his waist and the other stomped on my head while I was lying on the ground. He put the rope around my neck, then each of them took the end of the rope and started to pull. Blood came out of my nose and eyes. After a while, they took off the rope and left, thinking I was dead. I lost consciousness for a while. When I woke up, I was wet, but when I looked, I was covered in blood, alone and tied up.

The man found someone to untie him and hid, but policemen found him. He said they beat him again and took him back to the same commander, who gave them instructions to kill him. The man eventually talked his way out and went into hiding.

In Musaga neighborhood, where security forces also clashed with armed youth, police, and military forced their way into homes and accused residents of having weapons and harboring opposition fighters. Residents recognized *Imbonerakure* wearing police uniforms. Soldiers from Camp Muha and Camp Muzinda, two large military camps in Bujumbura, provided reinforcements. As gunfire and explosions rang through the neighborhood, a resident said he heard someone yell: “Get out of the house!” He said:

When we went out, I saw almost a dozen API policemen. Three of them had machine guns, three had rocket launchers and others had Kalashnikovs with grenades. Some had what looked like an ax a butcher might use. Inside our compound, they were shooting everywhere. They were drunk. They made us lie down on our backs and spread our arms and look at the sun. Hot shells were falling on us. They drank Amstel (beer) and poured it on us. They said: “Where are the youth who shot at us during the night?”

One of them cocked his gun and put it to my temple. Then he asked another (if he should kill me). I thought I was finished. Another said: "Wait." Then another one came and cut me (on my arm) with an ax. I had a wide wound and blood was shooting up like this into his face. I said: "You're killing me! You're killing me!" He said: "I didn't know it was so sharp."

He saw the police beating other people and kicking a man in the jaw. Two of the policemen entered his house, asked him where he kept his money, and looted sheets, shoes, clothing, and other valuables. The man lay on the ground for an hour and a half, then fled. Afraid to go to the hospital, he rubbed liquid from a medicinal plant on his wound and hid. Interviewed several weeks later, he said: "Now, if I'm arrested by the police, I will just say to them: 'Kill me so that I don't have to go through that again.'"

A 39-year-old man in Musaga who ran a small bar out of his house went out during a lull in the gunfire on December 11. Policemen and *Imbonerakure* in civilian clothes hiding in an open street gutter told him to go home. There he heard someone say, "Let's destroy the houses so that we can loot them." The police started shooting at his house. He hid behind a refrigerator. They shot open the outer door of the house and three *Imbonerakure* in police uniforms entered:

They said: "Come out from there immediately!" One of them took an iron bar and hit me twice in the back. One of them went into the room where my daughter and a bar employee were asleep. He stepped on them, pointed his gun at them and said: "Give me the money." The two other (men in police uniforms) stayed outside drinking beer. (One of the policemen) took all our suitcases and bags and put the beer in them. They took powdered milk and sugar. They took the meat out of the refrigerator and ate it raw. They said to me: "I'm going to show you how the *Imbonerakure* work."

They cut him on the head with a bayonet and he lost consciousness. He believes they thought he was dead and left:

They came back 20 minutes later to take other drinks. They found me sitting down and wiping blood from myself. They said: "You imbecile, are you still alive?" They took me to a place where around 50 (others) were tied up. They used my shoelaces to tie my arms behind my back. Men from the API, BAE and soldiers made us lie down on our backs. When (the security forces) finished drinking beer, they (balanced) the bottles on the throats of those of us lying down. When the bottle fell, they either kicked us or hit us with their gun butts. It was a form of punishment. They knew good and well that when you are tied up and looking at the sun, you can't hold out. Men came and kicked me. All of them kicked me like it was a game of soccer.

The police took him and other detainees to the police detention center known as BSR (*Bureau spécial de recherche*), warning them to remain face down in the truck or the police would smash their heads. At the BSR, the police beat him again. He saw *Imbonerakure* who were looking to see who was detained there. The Bujumbura prosecutor denied him medical treatment and accused him of being an opposition fighter. Human Rights Watch has no indication that he was a

member of an armed group. The man was released four days later.

Because of the insecurity and intensity of the gunfire, the Burundian Red Cross did not dispatch ambulances to pick up injured residents on December 11. Many only arrived at hospitals the following day.

Mass Graves

On December 12, 2015, police and *Imbonerakure*, accompanied by local government officials and public health workers, picked up some of the dead bodies from Musaga and took them away in local government vehicles to bury them in mass graves elsewhere, in and around Bujumbura. Reports of mass graves had already surfaced in November in Bugarama, in Muramvya province.

Human Rights Watch spoke to several witnesses who said that *Imbonerakure*, wearing surgical masks and gloves, dug three or four graves in a cemetery in the Kanyosha neighborhood and buried bodies there, completing the digging by the time the vehicles arrived with the bodies. One witness said he counted 20 bodies in one grave and eight in another, while a third grave remained empty. Another witness counted nine in one grave, nine in another, and 10 in the third. Authorities forbid those present from taking photos.

Two other bodies were found in a banana grove and a corn field near Mpimba prison on December 13, and a third was found on December 14, and buried nearby.

Local residents saw local government officials accompany the *Imbonerakure* to the Kanyosha cemetery. A health worker sprayed disinfectant on the bodies. After the burial, a local government official paid *Imbonerakure* from bundles of Burundian francs.

A Musaga resident said:

I saw how they were picking up the bodies. The bodies were scattered everywhere. In Kinanira II, I saw 12 bodies in the streets, near the houses. The population (residents) took three of them away. The nine others were thrown into three pick-up trucks... *Imbonerakure* who had come from Kanyosha and two from Musaga put the bodies in the trucks... In Kinanira I, there were four bodies, and there was another one opposite Camp Bataillon (a military camp). Some had been shot with bullets... At Camp Base, near Mpimba prison, nine bodies were found... In the river near the fields, there were three bodies without heads. One had police trousers on. The others were in civilian clothes... They threw them there like dogs. No one tried to find out who the victims were.

Another man said:

Some bodies were put in bags, then buried. Others were just thrown into the grave. Most had been shot. They were shot in the stomach, in the head, all over. Other had burns. Most were young men. The *Imbonerakure* with the police picked up the bodies from about 10 a.m. on Saturday (December 12). They finished burying them around 4 p.m. It took about three hours for them to offload the bodies... There were more than 20 *Imbonerakure* there, including the head of the *Imbonerakure* from Musaga... Three of

the victims were wearing police uniforms and two military uniforms, but it looked like someone had put the uniforms on them because they didn't fit properly.

When they (the *Imbonerakure*) were burying the bodies, it was as if they were proud, but they knew they had done something wrong. They said things like: "Whether you like it or not, you have to accept his (Nkurunziza's) mandate"... It was horrible to see how these people were killed.

Local sources who saw dead bodies in Nyakabiga before they were taken away reported that some had been shot in the back, others in the head. Some bodies were found in street gutters. There were also reports from journalists, activists, and other sources that some were found in the Ntahangwa River.

Bodies from Nyakabiga were taken near Mpanda cemetery, on the outskirts of Bujumbura, and buried in mass graves there. There were unconfirmed reports of bodies buried in other locations.

The authorities made no attempt to identify the victims. It has not been possible to confirm how or by whom they were killed. Some sources alleged that most had been shot dead by the security forces on December 11; others believed that some of the dead may have been *Imbonerakure*.

Targeted Killings

In a number of other cases, people suspected of opposing the government were singled out and killed.

Sources told Human Rights Watch that intelligence officials had offered money to those who had demonstrated against Nkurunziza's third term in 2015 to reveal where demonstrators and other opposition sympathizers lived.

On December 1, the bodies of three young men, some of whom may have been members of an opposition party, were found with their throats slit on 10th Avenue in Mutakura. Human Rights Watch saw photos of their bodies with deep cuts on their throats, and footage of a local resident saying people were being slaughtered like cows.

On January 3, at about 7:30 a.m., policemen in Musaga stopped Pascal Nshimirimana, a musician and part-time barber in his mid-20s who was known as Lissouba, as he was returning from buying food. He was with three other men, including a domestic worker.

Five policemen approached them, including one policeman in civilian clothes, whose hair Nshimirimana had agreed to cut on that day. The police asked the men why they were there and where they were coming from, demanded their identity cards, and ordered the men to follow them. One escaped. The policemen told the others to sit on the ground. Nshimirimana refused. By this time, 10 policemen had gathered around them.

A witness said:

All the policemen focused their attention (on Nshimirimana) and forced him to sit down. The domestic fled and was shot at, but he was lucky and wasn't hit. I saw a policeman shoot Lissouba in the legs. He got up and (tried to) run in the direction of Mpimba central prison. I heard another gunshot. Other people went to see what had happened and found him dead.

Another witness went to the scene after hearing the gunshots:

I found policemen there, including the neighborhood police chief (*chef de poste*). I asked him why Lissouba had been killed. He said he was a rebel, and (accused me of) collaborating with them. He said he could use a rope to kill me. (Lissouba) was hit in the legs and had been shot in the spine. The bullet came out through his stomach. His intestines had come out.

When asked about the case by Radio France Internationale, police spokesperson Pierre Nkurikiye said that Nshimirimana and those with him were “getting ready to commit a crime.”

Early in the morning of November 7, 2015, a man in police uniform entered the *Coin des Amis* bar in Kanyosha and approached four customers – three men and a woman who were speaking Kinyarwanda, the language of Rwanda – and then left. A short while later, three men in police uniforms approached the bar and made customers sitting outside go inside. Two of the men in uniform stayed outside while the third told everyone inside to lie on the ground and take everything out of their pockets. He collected the phones and money, then began shooting them. A survivor said:

I saw them kill nine people. It's difficult to know who (the perpetrators) were. They could have been *Imbonerakure* in police uniforms. Police had come to the bar about a week before. They had asked staff at the restaurant: “Where are the criminals who drink here?”

The attackers stole the owner's vehicle and fled. The car was later found riddled with bullets in a rural area.

Possible Disappearances

Numerous sources in Bujumbura told Human Rights Watch about people who went missing in December, January, and February. In some cases, there were indications that state agents took the person away. In others, relatives or friends had been informed, through intermediaries or inside sources, that intelligence services might be holding the person, but were unable to confirm this or locate the person. In other cases, there were no leads at all. Many families are afraid to seek the authorities' help for fear that the police or intelligence services may have been involved in the abduction or disappearance.

Local activists, journalists, and other sources have also reported, including on social media, a noticeable increase in people going missing since December. The secretive nature of these cases makes it very difficult to confirm the details.

An enforced disappearance occurs when someone is deprived of their liberty by state agents or those acting with their acquiescence, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person.

In a new practice, families have been asked for large ransoms. Police have in the past routinely asked families for relatively small amounts of money to release detainees. But recently, the police, intelligence services, or their intermediaries have demanded exorbitant sums, ranging from 500,000 to 3 million Burundian francs (approximately US\$320 to \$1,900), well beyond the reach of most people. Families borrow the money, but with no guarantee that their relatives will be released or located.

On December 10, unidentified men in a vehicle believed to belong to the intelligence services picked up Marie-Claudette Kwizera, the treasurer of Ligue Iteka, a Burundian human rights organization, in Bujumbura. The family paid a member of the intelligence services, through an intermediary, more than US\$2,000 to secure her release. An intelligence agent and the alleged intermediary were subsequently detained. But there has been no sign of Kwizera. Ligue Iteka is one of a dozen non-governmental groups whose accounts were frozen by the prosecutor general in November and December 2015.

A local police chief (*chef de poste*) in Nyakabiga and former member of the judicial police, Donatien Twizera, disappeared in early February. He received a call from a policeman who may have asked him to come to a meeting. Twizera's motorcycle was later found outside Bujumbura. As a judicial police officer, Twizera had worked on a sensitive investigation into the murder of three Italian nuns in Bujumbura in September 2014, which may have implicated members of the intelligence services. More recently, he had been accused of sympathizing with the armed opposition, activists said. His whereabouts remain unknown.

In January, a suspected police informant directed police to the home of a man in his early 30s. On January 25, soldiers arrested the man and took him to a local military base. When a relative asked what he had done, one of the soldiers said: "(He) is a killer and a criminal." On January 26, 2016, soldiers brought the man back to his house, with his hands bound behind his back. He had been beaten and was covered in blood. A relative said:

He had blood on his face. They made him sit on the ground. They kicked him and hit him in the head with a gun barrel. He begged them to untie him. (The military) said: "Bring us the weapons." He said: "I don't have weapons." They said: "We are sure you will bring them." They said to his young child: "Here's your father, (but) you don't have a father. Say goodbye to him because you will never see him again." They told the man to get into the vehicle, but he couldn't because his chest was so swollen. They lifted him up and threw him into the truck. Someone said they saw them beating him on the head with a small hoe.

The soldiers also hit, kicked and spat on one of his relatives. The fate of the man they took away is unknown.

Arbitrary Arrests and Unfair Trials

Police and the intelligence services frequently round up groups of mostly young men – sometimes dozens at a time – and arrest them, accusing them of being part of the “rebellion.” The sweeping and arbitrary nature of these arrests means that any young man in neighborhoods such as Musaga, Nyakabiga, Cibitoke, Mutakura or Ngagara – where there were widespread demonstrations against Nkurunziza’s third term in 2015 – could be picked up, regardless of whether he has committed an offense.

Detainees are taken away on trucks, held in police cells or at the intelligence services, or taken to unknown destinations. According to one official, in the days following the December 11 attacks, some 100 young men were taken to the BSR police detention center. Some have been released; others have been transferred to central prisons, and others face long periods in pre-trial detention.

Some have been brought to court and tried in summary trials under a provision of the Burundian Code of Criminal Procedure that allows for an accelerated procedure for offenders allegedly caught in the act (“*en flagrante*”). Large groups of defendants have all been charged with the same offenses, with little attempt to establish individual participation in specific acts.

On January 11, for example, 68 people charged with illegal possession of weapons, were tried in a summary trial by the Tribunal de Grande Instance of Bujumbura, sitting in the town of Muramvya, around 40 kilometers from the capital. The prosecutor provided no evidence to support the charges. Their trial lasted just one day, during which some defendants said they had been tortured and showed rope marks on their arms.

In some cases, police or intelligence agents have singled out individuals for particularly brutal treatment. These may include people who participated in or may have helped organize demonstrations against Nkurunziza’s third term. They are often separated from detainees in police stations and sent to detention centers run by the intelligence services, where treatment is frequently even harsher.

Lower level judicial authorities in Bujumbura privately told Human Rights Watch that in many cases, there is no due process. They said they have given up trying to follow legal procedures as they receive orders from their superiors to falsely charge people with offenses such as participation in rebel groups or illegal possession of weapons, regardless of whether there is any evidence.

Torture, Ill-Treatment

Human Rights Watch documented severe torture and ill-treatment by the police and intelligence services, at the time of arrest and in detention, particularly since late 2015. In some cases, police or intelligence agents tortured detainees to force them to sign confessions. In other cases, the ill-

treatment appeared to be punishment for alleged opposition to the government, or was designed to humiliate the victims.

Torture is not new in Burundi, but following the government crackdown against suspected opponents in 2015, it has become more systematic and brutal. Victims and other sources said that security forces or intelligence services had hit people repeatedly, and slammed gun butts into detainees, in some cases breaking their bones or smashing their jaws so that some of their teeth fell out. Others were pounded in the genitals with gun butts or cut with knives or machetes. An official said that some detainees arrived at detention centers with their teeth knocked out, bloody, swollen faces and in great pain. Some were then beaten again by high-ranking national or provincial police officials with iron bars, rocks or bricks.

Some of those who were badly injured by police have been denied medical treatment. Those beaten in locations other than detention centers have also found it hard to access medical assistance. Many people have been attacked at night and have been afraid to move around the city. Red Cross ambulances frequently do not operate at night because of security concerns. Injured people often arrive at hospitals in critical condition the following day. Some who were transferred to central prisons told their relatives they were happy to be in prison because they had survived detention by the police or intelligence services.

In late January, a 30-year-old man was beaten by men he believed were *Imbonerakure*. He said that they drove a metal rod repeatedly into his lower leg until the bone was crushed and broken in three places. He had deep open fractures to the lower leg. He also had wounds to his face and the left side of his body, where he had been beaten. He was left in an open gutter full of wastewater. He was in such pain that he asked those caring for him to kill him. He later died of his injuries.

Also in late January, a 44-year-old man who had been injured in an attack more than a year ago was approached by men he believed were *Imbonerakure*. They suspected he was an injured opposition fighter because he was wearing a cast. He had been treated for his earlier injury with a metal pin in his arm bone. The men tore off his cast and ripped the pin out of his bone with their hands. The man was so frightened that he hid for a month before seeking medical care. His arm was amputated, on his request, because he was afraid of being seen with a cast again. Some injured people reportedly fear being seen with casts or visible injuries because they may be associated with the opposition.

Armed opposition abuses

The Burundian armed opposition movement is fragmented, consisting of several groups with separate structures, most of whose leaders are in exile. It is not clear whether, or to what extent, they collaborate or coordinate their actions.

Two groups have formalized their activities since early January: the Republican Forces of Burundi (*Forces républicaines du Burundi*, FOREBU) and Resistance for a State of Law in Burundi (*Résistance pour un Etat de Droit au Burundi*, RED-Tabara). Both groups have claimed responsibility for some attacks. While RED-Tabara has claimed it only targets government

forces, many other people have also been injured in attacks attributed to the group.

On the evening of February 5, three *Imbonerakure* were killed in Gikoto, near Gasekebuye, in Musaga. A child of about 9 or 10 also died when a bullet hit him in the head. Four other people were injured.

On February 6, Thierry Habonimana, a former ruling party member, was shot dead in the shower of his home in Musaga. A local source said he was shot three times.

Armed opposition groups are believed to be behind a number of grenade attacks in various areas of Bujumbura, though they rarely claim responsibility. Some of these attacks appeared indiscriminate, killing or injuring many passers-by. Others were more targeted. In an unusual move, both FOREBU and RED-Tabara claimed responsibility for two attacks in Cibitoke and Musaga neighborhoods on February 6.

Recruitment, Training of Burundian Refugees in Rwanda

Since early 2015, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 240,000 Burundians have fled to neighboring countries, most to Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

At the same time, the Rwandan authorities have allowed Burundian opposition groups to organize, recruit and undertake military training on their territory.

Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 20 Burundians who said fellow Burundians recruited them in Rwanda's Mahama refugee camp between May and July 2015 to join a Burundian armed opposition movement. Mahama camp is run by the Rwandan Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs. The recruitment appeared to be well-organized. Two Burundian men in the refugee camp were described as the main recruiters, one of them a demobilized combatant. Some recruits said that men from their home provinces in Burundi were also tasked with recruiting them. Meetings were held in Mahama camp to encourage young men to join. Many recruits were told that they would receive military training to remove President Nkurunziza from power.

Some young men claimed they were recruited under false pretenses, such as being promised work, but then taken to a training camp. Dozens of recruits walked a few kilometers out of the refugee camp at night to a meeting point, then were picked up by private buses, or in other vehicles which they described as Rwandan military vehicles, and driven to the training camp, in a forest, a few hours' drive away; they were unable to confirm its exact location. There, Rwandan and Burundian men in military uniforms trained them in various military disciplines, including weapons training, war tactics, and digging hidden bunkers or trenches. Some witnesses said the Burundian military trainers were demobilized former soldiers. Witnesses estimated that several hundred recruits were trained in the training camp.

One 28-year-old man said:

(The boss of the camp) spoke Kinyarwanda. Sometimes, they called him James. There were Rwandans there who spoke Kinyarwanda. Sometimes they spoke English. Between themselves, when it was something they didn't want us to understand, they spoke English. The training was in Kinyarwanda.

Other recruits said the training was conducted in a mix of Kinyarwanda, English and Kirundi (the language of Burundi). Burundian military trainers told the recruits not to reveal they had been trained.

They told us we should leave (the training camp) and fight for our country, because in Burundi, the *Imbonerakure* are numerous. There was a senior official who came that day. He didn't live there. He came from time to time. His escorts wore Rwandan military uniforms.

Recruits spoke of a second site nearby, which they believed was another training camp. One of them had carried food to the training camp but never entered it.

At the training camp, a man came and took a photo of each recruit. These photos were later used to provide the recruits with fake Congolese electoral cards. Before leaving the training camp at night, instructors told them they would receive more information about their mission when they arrived in Burundi. The recruits were divided into groups of 25 and subgroups of five. Each subgroup had a leader, who was given a phone and told to call a number for instructions when his group arrived in Burundi. These groups were driven at night to a house where a Rwandan man provided them with food. After a few days, they were driven at night to a river. Rwandan men in civilian clothes told them to undress and gave them a jerry can to float across the river into Congo. Because many did not know how to swim, the Rwandans swam next to them across the river.

Once they had crossed the border into the Democratic Republic of Congo, vehicles took them to various locations. Congolese authorities arrested some of them in and around the town of Uvira and others as they attempted to cross into Burundi.

Human Rights Watch has not been able to confirm whether recruitment and military training of Burundians in Rwanda has continued more recently.

In a February 22 [letter](#), responding to Human Rights Watch's findings, the Permanent Secretary in the Rwandan Ministry of Justice wrote that the Rwandan government had heard of "broad allegations of insecurity among Burundian refugees" and was seeking "information that may be useful in carrying out investigations in the context of protection for the refugees but also the possible violations of Rwandan territory implied by the allegations." The letter poses a series of questions regarding Human Rights Watch's research and states that the Rwandan government "remains very interested in following up this issue if indeed the account can be verified." It states that in the absence of information verifying Human Rights Watch's claims, it would be "unwise to publish such a report as it would only be another example of sensationalism aimed at making

news rather than protecting human rights” and would “serve to create a diversion from the conflict in Burundi.”

In a confidential document leaked to the media in January 2016, the UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo came up with similar findings on recruitment and training of Burundian refugees in Rwanda in May and June 2015. Burundian recruits told the Group that there were at least four companies of 100 recruits each at the training camp while they were there. Six of the trained recruits who spoke to the Group were minors.

Rwandan foreign affairs minister Louise Mushikiwabo told the media in early February that these were “unfounded” and “unverified” allegations and that the international community was using Rwanda as a scapegoat. In October and December 2015, Rwandan minister for disaster management and refugee affairs Séraphine Mukantabana was quoted in the media describing as false similar allegations by the non-governmental organization Refugees International and other sources.