

## BURUNDI

***Government security forces in Burundi reportedly arrested more than 70 primary and secondary students and used more than a dozen primary and secondary schools in the capital as bases. Grenade attacks by unknown assailants impacted several schools.***

### **Context**

Burundi faced an escalating political crisis starting in April 2015, when President Pierre Nkurunziza ran for a third term in office, despite the two-term limit on the presidency.<sup>426</sup> Government intelligence services, police, *Imbonerakure* (the youth militia of the ruling party) and the military repressed protests and cracked down on the opposition, particularly activists and journalists.<sup>427</sup> The UN and human rights groups documented patterns of torture, ill treatment, and sexual violence, including the rape and forced impregnation of government opponents, which often appeared to target Tutsi women or women associated with the opposition, at the hands of the police, military, and *Imbonerakure*.<sup>428</sup>

During just the first few months of the crisis, thousands fled their homes to neighboring countries.<sup>429</sup> As of February 2017, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that nearly 150,000 were internally displaced, and as of March 2017, UNHCR reported that more than 400,000 Burundians were refugees, over half of whom fled to Tanzania.<sup>430</sup>

After April 2015, NGO and UN sources reported that the crisis, economic hardship, and food insecurity contributed to rising school dropout rates and increased insecurity inside and near schools.<sup>431</sup> According to a report by the Forum pour le Renforcement de la Société Civile (Forum for the Strengthening of Civil Society), dropout rates in Bujumbura rose more acutely among boys than girls. Education officials contended that the political crisis had led to “criminal repression” of boys.<sup>432</sup>

Armed actors affiliated with the government were responsible for the majority of attacks on education in Burundi. These attacks typically affected student protesters, whose activities ranged from doodling on pictures of the president in textbooks to holding demonstrations. Burundi did not meet the threshold for inclusion in the 2014 edition of *Education under Attack*, so GCPEA was unable to make comparisons with the previous reporting period.

### **Attacks on schools**

GCPEA found information indicating that there were sporadic grenade attacks that affected schools in 2015 and 2016. The UN and other sources noted a pattern of grenade blasts affecting schools between April and November 2015, although these reports did not indicate the frequency of these incidents.

Incidents identified by GCPEA included the following:

- The UN reported that on June 16, 2015, a grenade allegedly hit a school in Bujumbura, wounding a 15-year-old boy.<sup>433</sup> A police officer attributed the attack to demonstrators opposed to the president’s bid for a third term.<sup>434</sup>
- On June 29, 2015, a grenade attack hit a school in Bururi province. Elections were scheduled in the province for later that day. According to the UN, the attack prompted children to flee the school, but no one was injured. Upon the children’s return, they reportedly found the military in their school. It was not clear whether the military was using the school or responding to the grenade attack.<sup>435</sup>
- On April 27, 2016, a local radio station alleged that a grenade exploded in a schoolyard in Gihanga, Bubanza province, killing one student. The perpetrator and motivation of the attack were unclear.<sup>436</sup>
- According to another local radio station, on June 14, 2016, a grenade exploded next to a primary school in Ngozi province, killing two people and injuring five more. Two of those injured were school children. The grenade exploded in an army corporal’s pocket, and it was not clear whether the attack was intentional.<sup>437</sup>

### **Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel**

The US Department of State indicated that the government detained, arrested, and imprisoned at least 70 students and teachers during the reporting period.<sup>438</sup> The majority of these individuals were students who were arrested in 2016 for

doodling on pictures of the president in textbooks. However, there were also occasional reports in 2015 of armed groups targeting students and teachers inside schools, and of violence affecting students along school routes.

Intimidation and insecurity characterized attacks on students and educators in 2015. In the lead-up to the presidential election, from April to July 21, 2015, dozens of individuals reported that the *Imbonerakure* entered schools and houses to threaten individuals who did not support President Nkurunziza, according to the Fédération Internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme (International Federation for Human Rights) (FIDH).<sup>439</sup> Education International reported that the government had continued to harass teachers since the outbreak of unrest in April 2015, and that as of October 2015, 253 teachers had fled the capital in search of safer locations.<sup>440</sup> Reports also indicated that violent outbreaks during protests affected students and teachers on their way to and from school. For example, according to *Info Afrique*, in May 2015 students' access to testing centers was constrained by clashes between police and protesters.<sup>441</sup>

Attacks on individuals took a different form in 2016, and students bore the brunt of government repression. According to the US Department of State, more than 70 students were arrested in 2016 for protesting President Nkurunziza by doodling on his image in textbooks while in class.<sup>442</sup> At least 38 students were arrested in Cankuzo, Muramvya, and Rumonge provinces in June alone.<sup>443</sup> The US State Department reported that, from May to July 2016, 440 students were suspended and 73 were detained for defacing pictures of the president in school textbooks.<sup>444</sup> These arrests included the following incidents:

- According to FIDH and *Al Jazeera*, on June 3, 2016, the police arrested five girls and six boys in Muramvya, charging them with “contempt of the Head of State.”<sup>445</sup> Reporting on the same incident, Human Rights Watch documented eight arrests.<sup>446</sup>
- NGOs and news sources reported that, later that same day, June 3, 2016, police used live bullets to disperse students who were peacefully protesting the arrest of those 11 students. Two students were injured. The police released 6 of the 11 arrested students on June 7, 2016, and later released 3 more. Two students, Alexis Mugerowimana and Perfect Iradukunda, remained in police detention, and as of October 2017 there was no information on their release.<sup>447</sup>
- FIDH reported that the police arrested 11 students in Bweru Commune, Cankuzo province, on June 17, 2016, also for doodling on pictures of the president. A week later police arrested 16 secondary students from the Lycée Communal, Rumonge province, for allegedly committing the same offense. All students were eventually released during the following weeks.<sup>448</sup>

On May 12, 2016, the police arrested a history teacher for unclear reasons after allegedly beating him in front of his secondary students in the Lycée Communal Mugamba in Bururi province. More than 1,400 students protested his arrest by refusing to return to class, according to a local news source.<sup>449</sup>

### **Military use of schools**

UN and NGO reports indicated that government security forces used at least 16 schools in Bujumbura during the reporting period. The majority of these cases were reported during 2016.

Reports of school occupation by police or military included the following:

- In December 2015, government security forces allegedly used one school as a police post in Bujumbura's Musaga neighborhood, according to Amnesty International.<sup>450</sup>
- In March 2016, FIDH reported the use of four schools in Bujumbura. Police allegedly used the Municipal Lycée in the Musaga neighborhood and the Municipal Lycée in Cibitoke neighborhood, while the military allegedly used the basic school of the Ngagara 3 neighborhood and the primary school of the Ngagara 5 neighborhood.<sup>451</sup>
- In May 2016, the UN independent investigation of Burundi documented police use of 16 schools in Bujumbura. The investigation reported that the police had occupied 10 of these schools for an extended period of unspecified length.<sup>452</sup> It is possible that some of these 16 schools overlapped with the four schools that FIDH documented as being used by the police or military in March 2016.

### **Sexual violence by armed parties at, or en route to or from, school or university**

Based on available information, GCPEA identified one case of sexual violence against a male student en route to school. The UN independent investigation reported that, in May 2015, students active in the *Imbonerakure* abducted a male classmate and took him to a house, where he was handcuffed and raped by three men because he had refused to join the *Imbonerakure*.<sup>453</sup> Such cases of sexual violence may have been underreported, given allegations that government security forces systematically used sexual violence to persecute perceived opponents, particularly women and girls.<sup>454</sup>

### **Attacks on higher education**

The crisis had a general effect on higher education, with some universities, particularly in the capital, closed for varying periods of time.<sup>455</sup> For example, the Burundi branch of the Akilah Institute for Women closed in April 2015, due to increasing violence and insecurity for students en route to the campus.<sup>456</sup>

Attacks directly targeting higher education were more sporadic, according to information collected by GCPEA. Arrests and the threat of violence affected university students in at least two incidents that occurred after the start of the crisis:

- The *New York Times* reported that, in late April 2016, students fled the University of Burundi in Bujumbura after the government closed it down.<sup>457</sup> More than 500 of these students set up a protest camp next to the US embassy, seeking its protection. The students remained there for several weeks. Police broke up their camp on June 22, 2016, after which some students crawled under the gate or threw themselves over the walls of the embassy. The students stayed in the parking lot of the embassy for the rest of the day, expressing fear for their lives if they left.<sup>458</sup>
- *Radio France Internationale Afrique* reported that two students of the University of Burundi were arrested on April 1, 2017, while demonstrating against a government decree that would transform their tuition grants into loans.<sup>459</sup>

<sup>426</sup> “Burundi delays elections amid Pierre Nkurunziza third-term bid,” *BBC News*, June 4, 2015. “Burundi: Attacks by Ruling Party Youth League Members,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 19, 2017.

<sup>427</sup> “Burundi: Attacks by Ruling Party.” “Burundi: UN human rights experts urge strong action in light of ‘widespread’ violations,” *UN News Centre*, September 20, 2016.

<sup>428</sup> “Burundi: UN human rights.” “Burundi: Attacks by Ruling Party.” UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2017/249, paras. 86-87. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), *Repression and genocidal dynamics in Burundi* (Paris: FIDH, 2016), pp. 88-92.

<sup>429</sup> “Thousands of Children Fleeing Burundi Conflict Alone,” Save the Children, June 8, 2015. Azad Essa, “The refugee children of the Burundi crisis,” *Al Jazeera*, July 7, 2015.

<sup>430</sup> UNICEF, “Burundi Humanitarian Situation Report,” March 31, 2017, pp. 1-2. “Burundi Situation,” UNHCR Operational Portal: Refugee Situations, December 27, 2017.

<sup>431</sup> Forum pour le renforcement de la société civile (FORSC), *Impact of the political and economic crisis on education in Burundi* (Bujumbura: FORSC, 2017), p. 6. UNICEF, “Burundi Humanitarian Situation,” p. 2.

<sup>432</sup> FORSC, *Impact*, p. 7.

<sup>433</sup> “Statement attributable to UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern & Southern Africa, Leila Gharagooloo-Pakkala, on school attack in Burundi,” *UNICEF press centre*, June 19, 2015.

<sup>434</sup> “UNICEF: Attack on Bujumbura School a Senseless Tragedy,” *VoA News*, June 21, 2015.

<sup>435</sup> “Children bearing brunt.”

<sup>436</sup> “Bubanza, student killed by a grenade in school compound” (“Bubanza, un écolier tué par une grenade dans les enceintes de l'école”), *Radio Isanganiro*, April 28, 2016.

<sup>437</sup> “Ngozi: Two dead and five wounded in a grenade explosion” (“Ngozi: Deux morts et cinq blessés dans une explosion de grenade”), *Iwacu Burundi*, June 14, 2016.

<sup>438</sup> US State Department et al., “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices-2016: Burundi,” 2017, p. 8.

<sup>439</sup> FIDH, *Repression*, p. 144.

<sup>440</sup> “Burundi: teachers’ perilous working conditions to be addressed,” Education International, October 28, 2015.

<sup>441</sup> Leonidas Nzigamasabo, “Clashes and scenes of torture in Burundi” (“Affrontements et scènes de torture au Burundi”), *Info Afrique*, May 8, 2015.

<sup>442</sup> US State Department et al., “Country Reports 2016: Burundi,” p. 8.

<sup>443</sup> Carina Tertsakian, “Dispatches: Students Jailed for Doodling in Burundi,” Human Rights Watch, June 20, 2016.

<sup>444</sup> US State Department et al., “Country Reports 2016: Burundi,” p. 8.

<sup>445</sup> FIDH, *Repression*, pp. 129-130. Tertsakian, “Dispatches.” “Teens Arrested for Defacing Burundi President Photo,” *Al Jazeera*, June 4, 2016. “Burundi police shoot at students protesting against colleagues’ arrest,” *Reuters*, June 3, 2016.

<sup>446</sup> Tertsakian, “Dispatches: Students Jailed.”

<sup>447</sup> FIDH, *Repression*, pp. 129-130. Tertsakian, “Dispatches.” “Teens Arrested.” “Burundi police shoot.”

<sup>448</sup> FIDH, *Repression*, p. 130.

<sup>449</sup> Diane Uwimana, “When arrests cause trauma ...” (“Quand les arrestations provoquent des traumatismes ...”), *Iwacu*, May 25, 2016.

<sup>450</sup> Amnesty International, “My Children Are Scared”: *Burundi’s Deepening Human Rights Crisis* (London: Amnesty International, 2015), p. 5.

<sup>451</sup> FIDH, *Repression*, p. 82.

<sup>452</sup> UN General Assembly and HRC, "Report of the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi," A/HRC/33/37, para. 87.

<sup>453</sup> UN General Assembly and HRC, "Report on Burundi," para. 61.

<sup>454</sup> "Burundi: UN human rights." "Burundi: Attacks." UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General," S/2017/249, paras. 86-87. FIDH, *Repression*, pp. 88-92.

<sup>455</sup> Munyaradzi Makoni, "Universities close, students suffer in poll protests," *University World News*, May 8, 2015.

<sup>456</sup> Karen Sherman, "The Impact of Conflict on Women's Access to Education: Spotlight on Burundi," Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, May 12, 2015. "Akilah Institute Burundi closed, a few students on Kigali Campus," *Akeza.net*, December 16, 2015. "Temporary Closure of Burundi Campus," Akilah Institute, May 6, 2015.

<sup>457</sup> Marc Santora, "Grenades, Fear and Uncertainty Become Routine as an Election Nears in Burundi," *New York Times*, June 26, 2015.

<sup>458</sup> Santora, "Grenades, Fear." "Burundi: Students Camp in Front of US Embassy" ("Burundi: des étudiants campent devant l'ambassade américaine"), *rtbf.be*, April 30, 2015.

<sup>459</sup> "Protests against the removal of scholarships in Burundi: 2 students arrested" ("Protestations contre la suppression des bourses au Burundi: 2 étudiants arrêtés"), *RFI Afrique*, April 1, 2017.