

## Statement on the crisis in Burundi

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect is deeply concerned about the situation in Burundi following an attempted coup by Major General Godefroid Niyombare and elements of the Army against the government of President Pierre Nkurunziza. Today's attempted coup is a response to ongoing protests since the 25 April announcement by President Nkurunziza that he would seek a third term, potentially violating the constitution and the 2000 Arusha Peace Agreement. As a result of this crisis, over 70,000 people have already fled into neighboring countries since mid-April.

The present situation in Burundi remains extremely volatile. It appears that neither Major General Niyombare's forces nor those loyal to President Nkurunziza have full control of the capital or the country. If not urgently resolved there is a risk of a power vacuum developing that could have potentially catastrophic consequences for Burundi. Paramount among these is the risk that any further escalation or militarization of the current crisis could result in the commission of mass atrocity crimes against vulnerable civilians. Immediate steps must therefore be taken by all sides to de-escalate tensions, stabilize the country and protect the gains of more than a decade of peacebuilding.

Political crises in Burundi, including several unconstitutional changes in government, have previously triggered widespread political and ethnic violence. Despite this history, considerable gains have been made since the civil war of 1993-2005, during which over 350,000 people were killed and over 1 million displaced. There is an urgent need for expeditious international support for Burundi to ensure that the country is not plunged once again into a deep internecine conflict.

The African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council should urgently convene and respond to the situation. Sanctions should be swiftly imposed against any individuals found to be facilitating or committing gross violations of human rights, inciting violent conflict or breaching the Arusha Peace Agreement. The East African Community, AU and UN should coordinate their response to this rapidly evolving situation, placing the need to avoid recurring conflict and prevent the commission of mass atrocity crimes at the center of their engagement.

Regardless of the outcome of today's attempted coup, the Army, the Police and the government all have a shared responsibility to protect the people of Burundi. All major political parties within Burundi should call for maximum restraint by the Army and Police, and should refrain from using inflammatory language or inciting violence. All paramilitary groups and militias, including the Imbonerakure - the youth wing of the ruling CNDD-FDD party - should be immediately demobilized and disbanded as an important confidence-building measure. Burundi need not be a prisoner to its past history of conflict, but will require sustained assistance to get back on the path of national reconciliation and create conditions conducive for the holding of free and fair elections.

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