

Press release.

Subsequent to retaliatory measures undertaken by the government of Burundi against four lawyers and human rights defenders that materializes by the letter of the Prosecutor General at the Court of Appeal of Bujumbura on 29 July 2016 requesting the President of the Burundi Bar Association to disbar them, the four concerned lawyers would like to bring to the attention of both national and international opinion that:

1. Lawyers concerned by this request reject the unfounded accusations contained in the above-mentioned correspondence which is one of the forms of reprisals against their participation in peaceful protests last year aimed at defending the Arusha peace agreement and the constitution on one hand and the participation of three of them in the Committee against torture Special review during its 58th Session in Geneva from 26 to 30 July 2016, a historic session which was marked by the failure of the government of Burundi to answer questions asked by experts on a wide range of human rights abuses that the government continues to make responsible through its agents as documented and reported by the UN and the alternative report that the lawyers signed on behalf of their organizations.

2. Given this headlong rush, these Lawyers condemn the attempt to fabricate fallacious reasons aimed at sabotaging their work of defending human rights by denying them the status of lawyer since they are committed in engaging international judicial and human rights mechanisms. Without being exhaustive on the services of the four lawyers, it is worth mentioning the involvement of each of them to bring back the country on the path of the rule of law and fight against impunity:

- Lawyer Vital Nshimirimana is the Chair of FORSC and President of the Campaign Halte au troisième mandat which mobilized and coordinated the peaceful protests against the third term. FORSC is among the organizations that requested the ICC to conduct investigations over mass atrocities committed in Burundi. Maitre Vital Nshimirimana prosecuted the case related to the press law before the East African Court of Justice(EACJ) on behalf of nine NGOs (*amicus curiae*). He also defended the case related to the law on the Commission on lands and other assets (CNTB) before the EACJ. He led a civil society delegation which participated to the public hearing organized by the by the Committee on regional affairs and conflict resolution of the East African Legislative Assembly on 17 January 2016, a session that was boycotted by the Government of Burundi.
- Lawyer Niyongere Armel is the President of ACAT-Burundi and Coordinator of the SOS Torture campaign that provides regular monitoring report about human rights abuses and particularly torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments since December 2015 and he represents 60 families who approached the ICC. He was involved in several sensitive cases including that relating to the imprisonment of Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, prosecuted the case concerning the press law on behalf of the UBJ before the EACJ. He led a civil society delegation who presented the alternative report to the Committee against Torture on 28 to 29 July, 2016.
- Lawyer Dieudonné Bashirahishize is the vice president of the East Africa Law Society which is the only regional organization that requested the ICC to conduct investigations on crimes committed in Burundi. He was among lawyers who represented the Burundian's civil society in a case filed by



EACSOF in collaboration with PALU against the Third term of Pierre Nkurunziza in East African Court of Justice. He also chairs the Coalition of lawyer of victims of crimes of international law(CAVIB), composed of lawyers living in exile that are committed to fight against impunity of atrocities committed in Burundi. He is among the team of advocates that prosecute the case regarding the third term of Pierre Nkurunziza, on behalf of ECSOF.

- Lawyer Lambert NIGARURA is the President of the Burundian Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CB ICC) a large platform organizations of the Burundian civil society working with the Office of the ICC Prosecutor in gathering information related to crimes of the jurisdiction of the ICC. Lambert Nigarura also participates in the activities of the SOS Torture campaign as Deputy Coordinator.

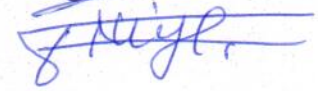
3. The lawyers concerned by the request of the Prosecutor General of the Court of Appeal of Bujumbura recall the extent to which the judiciary is dependent of the executive and has in the past violated the rights of lawyers including lawyer and President of the Burundi Bar association Isidore Rufyikiri who was disbarred and later filed and won a case with the EACJ(Ref No. 1/2014 of 15.05.2015). Lawyer Isidore Rufyikiri was also victim of his opinions. In the above-mentioned case, the Court directed the Secretary General of the EAC to dispatch an investigation Mission in Burundi (this is yet to be done) to assess the human rights situation in general and the state of the independence of the judiciary in particular in order to take possible sanctions against Burundi where the rule of law is permanently violated. Now that the government continues to violate the rights of the lawyers, these lawyers reiterate their will not to be intimidated by this desperate attempt to undermine their activities and that they will continue their fight against impunity in Burundi while defending the independence of the lawyer in the exercise of their activities through regional and international jurisdictions.

Done at Bujumbura on 04/08/2016

Advocate Bashirahishize Dieudonné



Advocate NIYONGERE Armel



Advocate NIGARURA Lambert



Advocate NSHIMIRIMANA Vital.

