



**Oral statement by FIACAT, co-sponsored by CCPR Center, DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project), OMCT, Protection International and TRIAL International**

**Item 4 - Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi**

*40th session of the Human Rights Council*

Thank you, Mr President

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Commission of Inquiry,

I am speaking on behalf of a coalition of Burundian NGOs<sup>1</sup> supported by FIACAT, the CCPR Center, DefendDefenders<sup>2</sup>, OMCT, Protection International and TRIAL International.

These organizations condemn the closure of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Burundi following a request from the Burundian government on 5 December 2018. Since 2015, the State has multiplied its refusals to collaborate with international human rights mechanisms, including by refusing to grant you access to the country. This action represents the culmination of this lack of cooperation and deserves to be firmly condemned by the Council.

Human rights violations are still common in Burundi. Cases of extrajudicial executions, torture, enforced disappearances, sexual violence and arrests, forced expropriations of property, notably affecting Burundians in exile, and arbitrary detentions, continue to be recorded by civil society.

The signatory organizations would also like to draw your attention to the food and livestock collections imposed on the population, which have become commonplace and which aggravate the famine that is currently raging. In addition, forced contributions for the 2020 elections continue to be collected and often determine access to public services, including education. Some pupils are expelled from school if they are unable to present a payment receipt for such a contribution.

Burundi must immediately stop these practices and to ensure respect for the civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, of its people.

Finally, the situation of human rights defenders in Burundi remains very worrying. The case of Germain Rukuki is a flagrant case thereof. Germain was sentenced on 26 April 2018 to 32 years imprisonment for his work for ACAT Burundi – a conviction that emanated from an arbitrary procedure marked by flagrant irregularities. The appeal hearing was held on 26 November 2018, but the verdict is still pending more than three months after the expiry of the legal deadline.

The signatory organizations therefore call on the Human Rights Council to examine this case and to help ensure that Burundian human rights defenders are no longer victims of systematic repression because of their work.

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> ACAT Burundi, CB-CPI, FORSC, APROD, FOCODE, CAVIB, UBJ, AJBE, RCP and SOS-Torture/Burundi.

<sup>2</sup> DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)