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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Disastrous human rights situation in Burundi

The conflict around the third mandate of President Pierre Nkurunziza has provoked massive protests, violence and repression in Burundi. During the year 2016 independent local media have disappeared and many journalists searched for protection in exile. Those who stayed at home had to respect self-censorship to survive. The National Intelligence Service, an instrument used by the government to oppress and surveil the population, has tortured hundreds of opponents of the authorities.

The rulings party's youth league, the Imbonerakure, have committed atrocious crimes and terrorized civilians. Burundians are living in fear about the next attack, too afraid to speak out to denounce the intimidations, torture and deliberate killings. They brutally killed, tortured and severely beaten hundreds of civilians. Since the beginning of the crisis in April 2015, security officials frequently have used members of Imbonerakure to identify suspected political opponents. Despite having no legal empowerment to act as official security forces, members of the youth league have arrested opponents who later were tortured by official intelligence and security staff. The members of the youth league are enjoying complete impunity, even in cases, in which they have been arrested for committing abuses, they quickly were released without any trial.

It is estimated that since the beginning of the conflict, some 700 people have been killed, 700 persons have disappeared. Only in November and December 2016 some 60 opponents, among them human rights defenders, have disappeared. All reports of enforced disappearances must be investigated independently. Some 5,000 Burundians have been arrested, but only 2,000 of them, have been released later.

With deep concern Society for Threatened Peoples has followed the public debate in Burundi on impunity. Instead of bringing perpetrators of massive human rights violations before trial, the government encourages impunity. Politically sensitive trials often are handled by magistrates with close contacts to the government. Furthermore Burundi has decided to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague after the ICC has opened an investigation in human rights abuses in the Central African state.

The government of Burundi has reacted by ignorance and denial to international criticism of its disastrous human rights record by the United Nations, African Union, European Union and EU Parliament. We are deeply concerned about the refusal of the government to negotiate with the African Union or to cooperate with the United Nations and its institutions. The country has diplomatically isolated itself by abandoning any cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We are deeply shocked about the crack down on all relevant national human rights organization and NGOs. At least 20 human rights activists have been murdered. The government must put an end to this climate of fear and intimidation in order to ensure national reconciliation and the search for a political solution to the deep crisis.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council to:

- Cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry of the United Nations,
- End impunity and bring perpetrators of massive human rights violations to trial,
- Release all political prisoners and stop intimidating presumed opponents,
- Enable an independent investigation in the human rights violations of the youth league Imbonerakure,
- Restart meaningful consultations with the political opposition to search for a political solution of the conflict.