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PRESS RELEASE

**Burundi: Human Rights Defender Expelled
in Run Up to Election**

Human Rights Watch researcher Neela Ghoshal was told on 18 May by the Burundi government that her work permit had been withdrawn just days before the country elects a government. ARTICLE 19 calls upon the Burundi government to refrain from intimidating critical voices, and to protect freedom of expression, a vital component in democratic elections.

Neela Ghoshal wrote a report titled: “We’ll Tie You Up and Shoot You” published by Human Rights Watch just days before being informed of her expulsion. The report addresses the lack of accountability for political violence in Burundi. Ghoshal has been ordered to leave by 5 June.

The government’s move comes as part of a wider crackdown in the run up to the elections, which have been unexpectedly delayed from 21 May to 28 May for unclear reasons.

“The decision to expel Neela Ghoshal and intimidate journalists and human rights defenders is tantamount to reducing the democratic space in the country, particularly the right to freedom of expression, and this must desist,” says Dr Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

“Free, open and diverse debate is even more critical in the run up to an election,” Callamard continues. *“The media and political commentators must be supported by the authorities to work freely and fairly.”*

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Burundi authorities to:

- To rescind the decision to expel Ghoshal and allow her to continue her work securely
- Prevent the use of violence, intimidation and reprisals against journalists, human rights defenders and civilians
- Create a conducive environment where the media can report freely the pre-election, election and post-election events and issues
- Respect the constitution and fulfil Burundi’s international and regional human rights obligations, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.