



13 March 2017
Check against delivery

**UN Human Rights Council
Thirty-fourth session: 27 February – 24 March 2017**

Item 4: Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi

Mr. President,

Amnesty International thanks the members of the Commission of Inquiry for this briefing.

From the start of the current crisis, the Government of Burundi has stifled the work of independent media and civil society, although, despite major restrictions on their work, NGOs continue to document and report serious human rights violations in the country. Since this Council discussed Burundi in September 2016, more restrictive measures have been imposed, including the closure of several human rights organizations and introduction of new controls on the work of NGOs. Human rights lawyers have also experienced reprisals. These moves have been mirrored by Burundi's continued refusal to engage meaningfully with international bodies, such as the Commission of Inquiry. As a member of this Council, Burundi's refusal to cooperate with its mechanisms is particularly egregious.

Free expression and a space for genuine dialogue and debate are essential to bring an end to the political and human rights crisis. These freedoms are also essential when major constitutional changes, such as changes to presidential term limits, are under consideration. Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the process to amend the Constitution has already begun at a time and in a context where it is dangerous to dissent, many people are too afraid to speak out and with much of civil society and the opposition in exile.

We call on the Government of Burundi to reverse the recent restrictive measures on civil society and allow independent investigators, including the Commission of Inquiry, full and free access to monitor and document the human rights situation in the country. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission recently began the work of exhuming mass graves linked to previous crises, with the participation of an international forensics expert. Burundi should also give the Commission of Inquiry access to all suspected mass grave sites linked to the current crisis. In the meantime, these sites must be secured and protected from any tampering.

Finally, Mr. President, we urge neighbouring countries to support the Commission of Inquiry's request for their cooperation in their investigations.

Thank you.