TOPIC: Actions to preventing the further deterioration of the human rights situation in Burundi;

Committee/Commission: Humanitarian Affairs Segment (of the ECOSOC)

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Burundi is a landlocked country considered part of Central Africa, bordered by Rwanda to the north, Tanzania to the east and south, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west. The country is governed as a presidential representative democratic republic and its capital is Bujumbura.

It is now emerging from a long history of social unrest and ethnic tension with successive civil wars which cost the lives of numerous civilians and left hundreds of thousands displaced. Extreme poverty, a lack of law and order and ongoing human right violations, from freedom of expression to right of association, continue to be major barriers to stability and sustainable peace in the country. Burundi is again today on the alarming brink of civil war.

The national development and growth of the country has been severely obstructed since Burundi’s decolonization. Indeed, thoroughly colonized during its history, firstly from the Germans and then from the Belgians, Burundi has finally gained independence in 1962. However, it still represents one of the poorest countries of the world, as well as one of the most corrupt; a 2010 Transparency International report named Burundi as the country with highest corruption rate in East Africa.

An event that surely brought devastating effects to both the territory and the population is the long-lasting civil war, broke out in 1993. Before explaining this, an important distinction has to be made. Two are the main ethnics groups that belong to the country: Tutsi, that represents a minority (about 15% of the population) but controls the institutional power, and the Hutu, the majority (85% of population) with small political power and growing feeling of resentment. This constantly enlarging ethnic division was one of the main factors that gave rise to the brutal war.

However, the actual outbreak took place on October 21, 1993 when Burundi’s first democratically elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye from the FRODEBU (Front for Democracy in Burundi) party, was assassinated by Tutsi extremists. As a result of the murder, violence broke out between the two groups, and an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people died within a year. Eventually FRODEBU regained control and in January 1994 they elected Cyprien Ntayamira as the President. Nevertheless, after only four months the President’s plane was shot down, killing him and the Rwandan President Habyaimana. Thus, a successive parliament speaker was appointed for a 4 year term and to him succeeded President Pierre Buyoya. Anyhow, the security situation did not improve. The influx of hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees and the persisting activities of armed Hutu and Tutsi groups further destabilized the regime.
Consequently, various efforts of the international community to create a peace process were made: Ceasefire discussions were held in Tanzania in 2000, facilitated by Nelson Mandela, and an agreement was reached which established a transitional government, where the presidency and vice-presidency would be rotated every 18 months, sharing power between the Hutus and Tutsis. While the government and Tutsi groups signed the ceasefire accord, two leading Hutu rebel groups refused to participate, and the fighting intensified. After 12 years and an estimated death toll of about 300,000 killed, the civil war was officially ended in 2006. Indeed, a South African ceasefire agreement, which had been made with the last of the Burundian rebel groups, was signed.

Since then, though the 2010 communal, parliamentary and presidential elections where considered generally successful given that they did not lead to large-scale violence, there were a number of human rights violations. Civil and political liberties were restricted and there was an increase of political violence and acts of intimidation against opposition parties, human rights defenders and journalists. Following the presidential elections, violations of the rights to freedom of expression and of opinion increased further.

Nonetheless, Burundi is now on the brink of a second civil war. On 25 April 2015, the ruling political party in Burundi, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), announced that the actual President of Burundi, Pierre Nkurunziza, would run for a third term in the 2015 presidential election. The announcement sparked protests and widespread demonstrations in the capital, Bujumbura, lasted for over three weeks. The violent police forces brought to dozens of victims and about 300 injured in only one day. During that time the country's highest court approved Nkurunziza's right to run for a third term in office.

An emblematic symbol of the oppressing campaign of intimidation against government critics is the case of Pierre-Claver Mbonimpa. The voice of this society member, president of the local human rights organization APRODH (providing vital assistance to detainees and to victims of basic rights violations, including torture and sexual abuse), has been currently silenced by the Burundi government. He was arrested overnight on the 15 of May of 2015 and is now held under control of the state security after speaking out on Burundian radio.

Hence, the 10th of November was requested a call for a special session of the Human Rights Council to contribute to UN and regional efforts to prevent atrocities in Burundi. The HRC strongly expresses its concern to the dramatic issue and “Condemns in the strongest possible terms political violence, human rights violations and abuses and incitement to violence on political, ethnic or other grounds in Burundi, as well as the ongoing impunity enjoyed by perpetrators, including police and security forces, youth groups affiliated with political parties, and officials.”
Glossary:
DETERIORATION: something once in good condition is now weakened, in decline, changing to an inferior level.

CEASEFIRE: A temporary suspension of fighting, typically one during which peace talks take place.

Bibliography:
http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/burundi.htm
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AfricaRegion/Pages/BIIndex.aspx

Useful links:
https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/16/burundi-video-highlights-police-abuses video of acts of police’s excessive force

At the left, Burundi’s map with main cities indicated.