

CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF BURUNDI (C.E.CA.B)
General Secretariat

"It is through dialogue and cooperation that we will reach lasting solutions" C.E.CA.B)

Communiqué N0 2 of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Burundi on Elections 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in communion of faith and family,

Dear Burundians,

As the risen Christ, we send you our greeting: Peace be with you!

1. As you know, during elections times like these, we, bishops of the Catholic Church in Burundi, based on the fact that we are fully citizens, committed in our faith, faithful to our vocation and mission as Pastors, drawing on the rich social teaching of the Church, try each time to accompany the faithful in three important ways in addition to our ordinary pastoral ministry. *The first is to teach and guide the civic education* of our faithful and of all citizens of goodwill to commit themselves to the elections with the dignity of son and daughters of God. *The second way is sending lay faithful to be election observers* so that we might witness the credibility of the elections. *The third way is to send our priests*, in exceptional cases and by explicit request, *to assist departments tasked with organizing the elections* including at the provincial and municipal level.

2. We make the effort to assist in these ways to make our contribution so that we can have free, non-discriminatory, inclusive and fair elections for all. We will try to accomplish a similar result in these elections.

3. However, you have seen it. Ever since the ruling party ignored our advice and nominated the current President of the Republic to run for a third term in the presidential elections, there have been major problems, especially in the city of Bujumbura. Because it violates the Constitution of the Republic, as read in light of the Arusha Agreement from which the constitution proceeded, people had already threatened to fight this candidacy. There are obvious clues, although some do not want them known, of a country in unrest. It is a fact! In the capital Bujumbura, confrontations between protesters and security officers are still resulting in imprisonment, injury and death. Some services no longer work, stores do not open as usual, and some schools are closed.

In the rest of the country, an uninformed person passing by would think the nation is secure, but there are also signs that the country is not peaceful. There is an air of fearful panic among people for various reasons: this is why some people no longer sleep in their homes and there are even those who have left the country. Many people among them accuse their political opponents of threats and intimidation to the point that they even fear the outbreak of civil war. The High

Commissioner for Refugees has counted close to 50,000 refugees mainly in neighboring countries such as Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania. Students who are still in boarding schools are demanding military presence to ensure their safety, a sign that they are scared.

For security reasons the government has even taken measures to send students who attend public universities and live in the dormitories home. Moreover, some foreign countries have already urged their citizens to leave Burundi, fearing for their safety. Private radio stations that citizens listen to willingly, except those close to the ruling party, have been shut down; namely the African Public Radio and others such as Bonesha FM and Bonesha Isanganiro which are no longer allowed to reach their listeners outside Bujumbura. There are even rumors that start to blame ethnic identity as a cause of the conflict.

4. We expected that the ruling of the Constitutional Court was going to help improve the situation by making a decision along the lines of the truth that had been expressed by many inside and outside our country. But you witnessed how things went. We have taken note of this decision as law without being convinced of its veracity. Besides, it's not a only a question of law, it is also a political and social issue. This has prompted us to once again give our advice by underscoring that a good leader must know how to sacrifice for his country in the same manner a good father gives up what he is entitled to for the benefit of the salvation of his family.

5. With the present state of things, and if this situation continues, the elections we expected, peaceful for all, transparent, without intimidation and inclusion, are not possible. Safety is not guaranteed and there are no radios to relay everyone's ideas and programs. We are in a situation where even some members of the international community have frozen aid destined for the elections. Do you think that these elections are fair and good for all, and that their results are credible and acceptable for all?

6. Given all the above, we pastors of the Catholic Church, unequivocally demand the following:

- That the leaders who are primarily responsible for the country's security and all its citizens restore security in the capital Bujumbura and throughout the country without violating human rights. We ask that they avoid the loss of human life at all costs. We also ask the demonstrators to avoid violence, destruction and especially killing. Killing is a horrible evil no matter the reason.
- That the institutions responsible for organizing the elections use their ingenuity to agree to postpone certain deadlines in the electoral calendar so that the hearts of some may be appeased, refugees may return home and members of the presidential camp and opposition feel safe. Frank and sincere dialogue between parties where they figure out how to overcome sectarian interests and address real issues will prevent an institutional

vacuum during the electoral delay. We believe that it is better to avoid rushing which may not lead to real solutions, but search for lasting solutions in the calm.

- That all citizens know that elections are necessary and unavoidable, but they must happen in a safe and peaceful environment for all, where all competitors are treated equally and enjoy the same rights, and other conditions that guarantee the holding of good elections are met.
- That the media authority recognize the legitimate right of citizens to information and to be informed. Allow all media to operate again: open all stations of Radio Publique Africaine. Other radio stations such as Bonesha FM and Bonesha Isanganiro must be allowed to broadcast again throughout the country as before because it is hardly conceivable that we could have good elections, fair and equitable for everyone, in the twenty-first century, when only radios which sing the praises of the ruling party are allowed to broadcast within the country. It is unjust not to respect the rules of the game.

7. If our suggestions are ignored and things remain as they are, we, the Bishops of the Catholic Church, openly declare that our Church will no longer be able to support this electoral process, either by sending observers who will monitor the elections, nor priests to different branches of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Taking into account the time left, if by May 17 these wishes are not taken into consideration, we request those priests to make the appropriate decision based on the agreement signed with the heads of the INEC, which includes a provision to resign in case the electoral process is unacceptable to them because it lacks truth, justice or reconciliatory perspectives. The Catholic Church cannot support or accompany an electoral process which, obviously, is not consensual and whose results thereof might divide the citizens instead to reconciling them and put them on the path of peace and development.

For the Catholic Bishops Conference of Burundi

Bujumbura May 12, 2015

+ Banshimiyubusa Gervais , Bishop of Ngozi and President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Burundi

+ Evariste NGOYAGOYE , Archbishop of Bujumbura and Vice- President of the Conference of Bishops of Burundi