



April 21, 2015

H.E Secretary of State John Kerry
2201 C Street NW
Washington DC 20520

3025 4th St. NE, Suite 122
Washington, D.C. 20017

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We, the Catholic Task Force for Africa (CTFA), a coalition of Catholic religious orders, organizations and individuals committed to advocating for peace, justice, good governance, conflict prevention, reconciliation, religious freedom and development in Africa, write to ask that you use the influence of your good offices to help save lives of Burundians and in Africa's Great Lakes Region.

The political situation in Burundi is deteriorating rapidly over the issue of presidential term limit. Article 96 of the Burundian Constitution of March 18, 2005, which came out of the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Burundi stipulates: *"The President of the Republic is elected by popular votes for a term of five years renewable once."*

Unfortunately, after failing to amend the constitution to enable him run for a third term, President Pierre Nkurunziza is actively trying to reinterpret the Arusha Agreement to bid for a third term. If he follows through, it will significantly reverse political and economic gains made since the Arusha Accord and subsequently fuel civil unrest which will result in loss of life.

Mr. Secretary, we have confidence that you can make a difference because you have done it before. Under your leadership, the notorious rebel group M23 which operated in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo was defeated in November 2013 because you made calls to different stakeholders.

We are writing to urge you to use all available diplomatic channels once again to persuade President Nkurunziza that a third term will politically and socially divide Burundians and further destabilize a nation that is slowly recovering from years of civil wars. The deadline to submit candidacy for the office of the president is set for April 30-May 9, 2015 by Presidential decree Number 100/71 of the March 27, 2015 convening elections.

Adding to the voices of civil society groups on this matter, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Burundi issued a pastoral letter on March 6, 2015 calling on President Nkurunziza to respect the presidential term limit as stipulated in the constitution (letter enclosed).

As a way forward, we request that you personally call President Nkurunziza to encourage and insist that he adheres to the rule of law, particularly article 96 of the Burundian constitution.

Additionally we recommend:

1. Reaching out to the Burundian constitutional court and the electoral commission to encourage them to assert their independence and privately or publicly tell President Nkurunziza that a third term is illegal and they will not validate it.
2. Reaching out to the Burundian army, police and intelligence services to encourage them to respect the Burundian constitution which requires them to defend the nation, keep order, defend state institutions (article 245), and be politically neutral and impartial in carrying out their duties (Article 256). Also, the US should put any discussion of US military training of Burundian soldiers on hold unless they are involved in African Union peacekeeping in Somalia.

May God bless you and guide you in your work.

Sincerely,

Rev. Aniedi Okure, OP
For the Catholic Task Force for Africa