



Statement by Chief Observer David Martin, on the suspension of the European Union Election Observation Mission to Burundi

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The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) notes that at the current time, conditions in Burundi do not allow for the holding of credible elections. This has been the case since the Mission's arrival, as noted during the EU EOM press conference in Bujumbura on 11th May. Conditions have in fact significantly deteriorated since then.

Among the factors which make credible elections impossible at the current time, I would underline the following:

1. A widespread atmosphere of fear and intimidation, now exacerbated by extremely volatile security conditions. Longstanding and on-going reports of Imbonerakure activity throughout the country have now been supplemented by a rising number of credible reports of human rights violations. The assassination of Zedi Feruzi, leader of the UPD opposition party constitutes a particularly serious instance of political violence.
2. In this context, even though the campaign period was extended as a result of a slight postponement of parliamentary elections, the Mission has observed that genuine electoral campaigning has not been possible for all candidates. In fact, only a few parties have been able to carry out visible campaign events, namely the ruling CNDD-FDD and UPRONA, while opposition parties have not engaged in substantial campaign activities, due to lack of security conditions and the prevailing climate of intimidation.
3. Independent media, already banned from broadcasting or purposefully limited to the capital, are no longer operational. Despite Government assurances that it would re-open them, independent media remain closed and their stations suffer from serious physical damage. A significant number of journalists have been threatened and forced to leave the country. In these circumstances, the State-run Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi (RTNB) has a nationwide monopoly on information. EU EOM media monitoring to date has recorded that the RTNB has shown a clear and consistent bias in favour of CNDD-FDD and UPRONA.
4. Demonstrations against the President's third mandate remain forbidden, and participants risk heavy sentences and are subject excessive use of force by security bodies. Some 30 people have died while demonstrating against the third mandate. The EU EOM would like to emphasise that despite the ruling by the Constitutional Court on President Nkurunziza's



candidacy, dissenting opinions are legitimate and prohibiting their expression is contrary to international standards for democratic elections and an oppression of political liberties and civil rights.

5. The EU EOM has observed the election commission's failure to demonstrate its independence, thus exacerbating the serious doubts expressed by civil society and opposition figures at the time of its nomination. The election commission (CENI) has consistently echoed government positions and has shown limited will to act transparently, for example in its refusal to grant political parties and civil society groups access to the national voter register, despite their concerns about its accuracy.

Based on all these factors, Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy and Vice President of the European Commission has decided, with my agreement, to suspend the deployment of the European Union Election Observation Mission. The EU EOM hopes that minimum conditions for holding democratic elections will be swiftly restored. These conditions must include respect of citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, political parties' rights to freely assemble and campaign, and the media's right to report and express opinions. The EU EOM hopes, equally, that necessary accompanying measures will be taken to reinforce the credibility of the election administration.

The EU EOM believes that, with political will, all of these can be agreed and restored through dialogue. The Mission will be pleased to return to Burundi to re-assume its independent observation, when there are clear signals that minimum conditions for democratic elections can be achieved.

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