

Thursday 22 May 2008

12. Calls on the Belarusian government to uphold and ensure the protection of all fundamental human rights and ensure Belarus' compliance with international standards, and in particular with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
13. Calls on the Belarusian government to revise the 2002 Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organisations and to restore procedures guaranteeing respect for freedom of religion;
14. Expresses solidarity with the united democratic opposition of Belarus and all Belarusian citizens who strive for an independent, open and democratic Belarus based on the rule of law; encourages the leaders of the opposition to demonstrate unity and resolve in the forthcoming parliamentary elections;
15. Calls on the Council and the Commission to take further steps towards the facilitation and liberalisation of visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, as only such action can help to fulfil the main goal of EU policy towards Belarus, namely to facilitate and intensify people- to-people contacts and to democratise that country; urges them, in this context, to consider the possibilities for lowering the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens entering the Schengen territory, which is the only way to prevent Belarus and its citizens from becoming increasingly isolated;
16. Deplores the Belarusian authorities' repeated refusal to grant entry visas to Members of the European Parliament and national parliamentarians in the last couple of years; calls on the Belarusian authorities not to create any further obstacles preventing the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with Belarus from visiting the country to observe the forthcoming general elections and obtain first-hand experience in Belarus;
17. Expresses its solidarity with the United States and its diplomatic service, and calls on the government of Belarus to reconsider its decision and to take immediate steps allowing for a normalisation of the relationship between Belarus and the United States on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and the government of Belarus.

Rising tension in Burundi

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European Parliament resolution of 22 May 2008 on the rising tension in Burundi

(2009/C 279 E/25)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Burundi,
- having regard to the Dar-es-Salaam Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement between the government of Burundi and the National Liberation Forces (FNL), signed on 7 September 2006,
- having regard to the Action Plan adopted in Cape Town on 22 to 23 February 2008 (the Action Plan),
- having regard to the Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union concerning the attacks at Bujumbura, of 23 April 2008,
- having regard to the statement by the President of the UN Security Council on the situation in Burundi, of 24 April 2008,

Thursday 22 May 2008

- having regard to the reports by the UN Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi,
 - having regard to the report by Human Rights Watch entitled 'Every Morning They Beat Me: Police Abuses in Burundi', of April 2008,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas since 17 April 2008 fighting has again erupted between government troops and the FNL in Burundi, forcing thousands of civilians to flee their homes and resulting in the deaths of 50 rebel fighters,
- B. whereas after 14 years of civil war Burundi has yet to establish a lasting peace, while the conflict has created a critical humanitarian and socio-economic situation that endangers regional stability,
- C. whereas over the past two years international efforts to establish a peace agreement between the Burundian Government and the FNL — including the Regional Peace Initiative on Burundi — have been unsuccessful,
- D. whereas negotiations between the Burundian Government and the FNL broke down in July 2007 when the FNL walked out of the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JVMM) created to oversee implementation of the Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement,
- E. whereas the continuing insurgency by the FNL is seen by many as the final barrier to lasting stability in Burundi, and a political solution is needed in order to secure the disarmament of the FNL,
- F. whereas in early May 2008, the foreign ministers of Tanzania and Uganda, meeting under the auspices of the Regional Peace Initiative on Burundi, urged the FNL and other senior rebel leaders to leave Tanzania where they are based and to travel to Burundi to enter into peace talks,
- G. whereas attacks were launched in August 2007 against the homes of political figures who were not supporters, or who were former supporters, of the President of Burundi Pierre Nkurunziza,
- H. whereas 46 Members of the Burundian Parliament, fearing for their physical safety, have written to the UN Secretary-General to request United Nations protection,
- I. whereas the European Union has chosen Burundi as a pilot country for the implementation of a priority Action Plan aimed at increasing the speed and efficiency of assistance to developing countries that are in a precarious state,
- J. whereas over 700 households (around 3 500 people) are said to be in the care of the authorities at present, awaiting food and emergency supplies,
- K. whereas the latest bout of fighting is part of a series of clashes which have left even more households (35 000 people) displaced, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to over 100 000; whereas Tanzania wants to return its Burundian refugees to Burundi, while Burundi is still taking in thousands of Rwandan and Congolese refugees,
- L. whereas it is alleged that Burundi's security forces have illegally detained around 200 people accused of supporting FNL rebels,
- M. whereas on 2 May 2008 the Burundian Government reported that four rebel fighters and one Burundian soldier had died in what was described as an FNL-initiated ambush,

Thursday 22 May 2008

- N. whereas the climate of impunity in Burundi has created a situation where torture by the police and security forces is rife, as is illegal detention,
- O. whereas the Burundi national police force, established under a transitional government in 2004, is not well trained and is made up of former rebels and soldiers as well as police officers,
- P. whereas Unicef assisted in the demobilisation of over 3 000 child soldiers in Burundi between 2004 and 2006; whereas children recently escaped from a demobilisation centre and went on the rampage, and over 500 children are still in the hands of the FNL,
- Q. whereas Burundi was the third country, after Uganda and Ethiopia, to contribute to the African Union peacekeeping mission to Somalia based in Mogadishu (Amisom), by sending 800 soldiers despite the precarious security situation in Burundi,
1. Expresses serious concern at the recent military confrontations in Burundi between the National Defence Forces and the FNL, which have resulted in the loss of innocent lives;
 2. Calls on all parties to respect the Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement resume negotiations and move swiftly to implement the JVMM established following the ceasefire;
 3. Urges in particular the FNL, and its leader Agathon Rwasa, to engage constructively in the peace process;
 4. Calls on the states neighbouring Burundi to ensure they do not serve as bases for the rebel movement, and welcomes Tanzania's decision to cease acting as a haven for FNL leaders;
 5. Calls on the Commission to draw up measures to facilitate the reintegration of former FNL fighters into society once an agreement is signed;
 6. Calls on the Commission to step up its humanitarian assistance, including for refugees and IDPs, and to scale down such assistance only when it is replaced by tangible development actions, in order to ensure a smooth transition between humanitarian operations and development policies;
 7. Calls on donors to honour their undertakings and ensure closer upstream coordination, in order to increase aid effectiveness;
 8. Calls on the Commission to propose a swift and significant increase in the financial resources which the European Union grants to Burundi, notably on the occasion of the mid-term review of the 10th European Development Fund;
 9. Calls on the Commission, in view of the fragility of Burundi and within the framework of the much-needed Action Plan, to give priority support to:
 - programmes for better governance and democratic state management;
 - health policies, through the creation of health centres and the essential renewal of the hospital network;
 - the decision by the Burundian Government to provide free primary education;
 - the continuing efforts to renew the infrastructure in Burundi;
 10. Insists, in view of the urgency of the situation, that the emphasis should be placed on tangible actions visible to the people of Burundi;
 11. Calls on the Commission and Member States to reinforce their presence on the ground in Burundi;

Thursday 22 May 2008

12. Calls on the Commission to promote actions by NGOs and local authorities in the European Union aimed at assisting local authorities and civil society in Burundi;
 13. Reaffirms its support for the South African facilitation and for the regional initiatives, and remains resolved, as part of the political directorate, to play an active part in removing obstacles to implementation of the Action Plan and to assist in all efforts to reactivate negotiations and consolidate peace in Burundi; supports also the mediation efforts of the UN Commission for the Consolidation of Peace;
 14. Notes the greater stability that has come to Burundi since the entry into force of a new constitution followed by general elections, but calls for the establishment of a peace and reconciliation commission as a confidence-building measure that will help restore a climate of confidence and stability among the various interested parties, and calls on the governments of the Member States to support such an initiative financially and logistically;
 15. Calls on the Burundian Government to take immediate action to ensure respect for the rule of law, end the climate of impunity, ensure that perpetrators of abuses are brought to justice and improve the training of the police force;
 16. Welcomes the recent release of 232 children, following eight months of negotiations with a dissident faction of the FNL by, inter alia, the Burundian Government, civil society and UN agencies;
 17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Co-Presidents of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the UN Security Council, the African Union, the governments and parliaments of the states situated in the African Great Lakes region and South Africa.
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