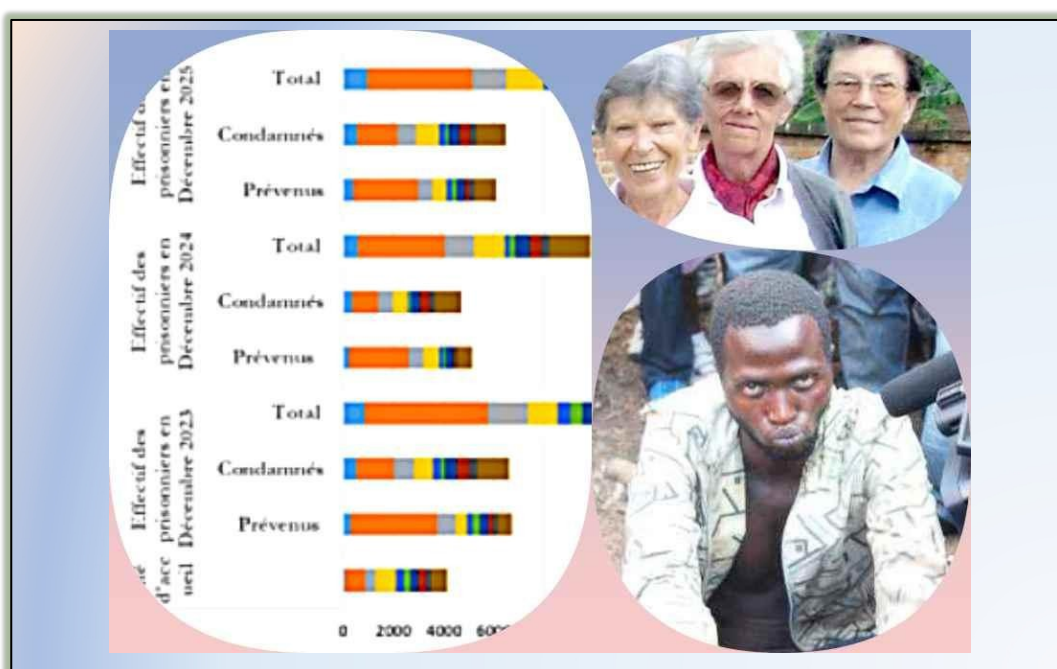


ANNUAL REPORT ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

2025 Edition

Rampant prison overcrowding in 2023, 2024 and 2025 due to arbitrary or unlawful detention and delays in the processing of court cases



- ***Left: Diagram showing prison overcrowding in 2023, 2024 and 2025***
- ***Top right: Sister Olga Raschietti, Sister Lucia Pulici and Sister Bernadetta Boggian murdered on the night of 8–9 September 2014, with the Burundian justice system failing to identify the perpetrators of this heinous crime.***
- ***Bottom right: Christian Butoyi, a man with intellectual disabilities who has been detained and prosecuted since 2014 for the murder of the three sisters mentioned above (see details on page 30). This is a emblematic case that illustrates the slowness of the judicial system, one of the main factors contributing to prison overcrowding.***

At the time of writing, the Public Prosecutor's Office in Parma, Italy, announced on 26 February 2026 that 'Guillaume Harushimana, a former member of the Burundian secret police, has been arrested in Italy as part of an investigation into the murder of three Italian nuns killed in 2014'.

Source: La Croix: <https://www.la-croix.com/religion/meurtre-de-trois-religieuses-au-burundi-un-ex-membre-de-la-police-secrete-arrete-en-italie-20260226>

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- **BBN:** Bureau de normalisation
- **BSR:** Special Research Bureau
- **CNDD-FDD:** National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy
- **CNIDH:** Independent National Human Rights Commission
- **CNL:** National Congress for Freedom
- **CPD:** Council of Patriots
- **ECOFO:** Primary School
- **MSD:** Movement for Solidarity and Democracy
- **RANAC:** National Rally for Change
- **RED-TABARA:** Resistance Movement for the Rule of Law (RED) – Tabara
- **SNR:** National Intelligence Service
- **UPRONA:** Union for National Progress

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual report by Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT-Burundi) presents an analysis of the human rights situation in Burundi during 2025, based on monitoring activities carried out by the organisation in several provinces of the country as well as in various prisons.

Ten years after the political crisis of 2015, the human rights situation in Burundi remains deeply concerning. The year 2025 unfolded against a political backdrop marked by elections, in a climate characterised by persistent restrictions on civic space, intimidation targeting political opponents, and pressure and threats against human rights defenders and journalists.

Information gathered by ACAT-Burundi over the course of the year indicates that serious human rights violations remain frequent and largely go unpunished. Murders, abductions, arbitrary arrests and acts of torture continue to be reported in various regions of the country.

In many documented cases, the alleged perpetrators are state agents, notably members of the security forces and the National Intelligence Service (SNR), sometimes acting with the involvement of members of the ruling party's youth league, the Imbonerakure. Judicial investigations remain rare and ineffective, which continues to reinforce a climate of systemic impunity.

The following overview of key figures on violations documented by ACAT-Burundi in 2025 highlights the worrying trend in violations

- 185 cases of murder
- 49 cases of abduction or enforced disappearance
- 125 cases of arbitrary or unlawful arrests
- 42 cases of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

These figures fall short of the true picture, as many cases go unreported due to fear of reprisals and restrictions imposed on civil society organisations.

The report also highlights the ongoing crisis in Burundi's prison system, characterised by extreme overcrowding and particularly worrying conditions of detention.

As at 31 December 2025, the prison population stood at 12,749 inmates, whilst the official capacity of the country's prisons is estimated at 4,294 places, representing an occupancy rate of approximately 296%. This situation seriously undermines respect for the fundamental rights of persons deprived of their liberty, particularly with regard to access to food, healthcare, hygiene and detention conditions that comply with international standards.

Arbitrary detention also remains a cause for concern. Several cases documented in this report show that some people remain incarcerated for long periods without trial, or continue to be detained despite court rulings ordering their release.

In light of these findings, ACAT-Burundi calls on the Burundian authorities to take urgent measures to put an end to human rights violations, combat impunity and improve conditions of detention in prisons.

The organisation also calls on the international community, United Nations bodies and Burundi's partners to remain focused on the human rights situation in the country and to support initiatives aimed at promoting justice, victim protection and respect for the rule of law

II. POLITICAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONTEXT IN BURUNDI

The human rights situation in Burundi in 2025 is a continuation of the political crisis that began in 2015 following former President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to seek a contested third term. This crisis was marked by mass demonstrations, violent repression, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and a significant exodus of the population to neighbouring countries.

Ten years after the 2015 crisis, Burundi continues to face major challenges, both politically and in terms of human rights. No structural reforms have been undertaken to address past abuses regarding respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, good governance and the rule of law.

Human rights violations intensified throughout the election period, from May to August 2025. Under the auspices of the CNDD-FDD party, the regime has further concentrated political power, systematically silencing other opposition parties and dissenting voices.

In terms of security, intimidation targeting opponents and others perceived as such reached alarming levels during the pre- and post-election periods. Some members of opposition parties were subjected to arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention.

The year 2025 was also marked by a climate of widespread tension, exacerbated by the escalation of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). **Clashes near the Burundian border led to a massive influx of Congolese refugees into Burundi.**

In September 2025, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi revealed that members of the Imbonerakure youth group, affiliated with the ruling CNDD-FDD party, had undergone military training in Cibitoke province with a view to deployment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He also stated that recruitment campaigns had been documented across the country, with recruits being sent to military training centres in Ngozi, Bururi, Cankuzo and Muramvya¹. Several international human rights bodies have expressed concern over the ongoing situation in Burundi, notably the United Nations Human Rights Council, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and various international human rights organisations.

In terms of human rights and civil liberties, 2025 was marked by a tightening of restrictions on civic space, which had already been severely curtailed for some time. Political opponents, human rights defenders and journalists are being harassed, threatened and intimidated. Since the start of the 2025–2030 parliamentary term, several journalists and reporters from private media outlets have been deliberately excluded from the activities of the National Assembly (NA). For example, on 12 September 2025, two journalists from the Iwacu media group were denied access to the building on the grounds that they *'were not on the list of invited media'*²

¹<https://www.hrw.org/fr/world-report/2026/country-chapters/burundi>

²<https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/assemblee-nationale-lacces-restreint-des-medias-prives-suscite-des-interrogations/>

Against this backdrop, several Burundian civil society organisations continue to operate under extremely difficult conditions. Some organisations have been suspended or forced to operate from exile since 2015, whilst many human rights defenders have been subjected to threats, judicial harassment or administrative restrictions.

The 2025 election period has been marred by numerous acts of intolerance and harassment against members of opposition parties, whose rallies have been cancelled or disrupted in several parts of the country without any valid reason. This was particularly the case for the UPRONA, RANAC and CNL parties in Buhumuza province³, in the east of the country.

This observation is shared by the United Nations Special Rapporteur, who highlights a lack of genuine political competition in a tense climate marked by ‘intimidation’, a ‘*severe restriction of civic space*’ and ‘*serious irregularities*’⁴.

Other incidents illustrate this hostile environment for the exercise of public rights and freedoms in 2025, notably:

- ✓ The arrest, on 13 June 2025, of the president of the Association of Survivors of the Kibimba Massacre and the president of the Association Lumière du Monde (ALM-Buta) at Melchior Ndadaye in Bujumbura, whilst they were on their way to a regional peace conference in Nairobi (Kenya).
- ✓ The detention and conviction of Sandra Muhoza, handed down on the basis of documents and judgments previously invalidated by the courts⁵.

In terms of human rights, Burundi has made no significant progress in respecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms compared to previous years.

Alongside other human rights organisations, ACAT - Burundi continues to document serious violations, including abductions, extrajudicial executions, acts of torture, and arbitrary and illegal detentions. These violations are attributable to state agents, namely the police and the national service, as well as to members of the Imbonerakure youth group, affiliated with the CNDD-FDD party.

Impunity remains the norm for the majority of these crimes, as the Burundian justice system is largely manipulated by various political and social pressure groups. Given the structural fragility of the institutions meant to protect citizens⁶, access to justice for victims remains problematic.

Furthermore, the Burundian authorities’ persistent refusal to cooperate with the UN Special Rapporteur demonstrates a clear lack of willingness to engage with international protection mechanisms.

In this context, ACAT-Burundi welcomes the decision by the UN Human Rights Council to renew the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Burundi until October 2025.

³ <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/2025/06/03/a-buhumuza-les-urnes-sous-tension/>

⁴ FOCODE, Burundi: Ten years after the crisis, the UN delivers a worrying indictment in Geneva, 27 June 2025
<https://focode.org/focodemag270625>

⁵ <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/affaire-sandra-muhoza-la-justice-se-contredit/>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/statements-and-speeches/2025/10/declaration-du-rapporteur-special-sur-la-situation-des-droits-de>

In socio-economic terms, Burundi has made no significant progress, as it ranks among the ten poorest countries in the world⁷. The population is plunged into extreme poverty: over 2.2 million people suffer from food insecurity and the country remains at the top of the global hunger rankings⁸. Chronic fuel shortages are paralysing the transport sector, whilst soaring prices have reached an unbearable level for the majority of the population and households. This situation contradicts the authorities' commitments to elevate Burundi to the rank of an emerging country by 2040⁹.

With regard to the prison situation in Burundi, ACAT-Burundi welcomed the resumption of prison decongestion measures at the end of June 2025. This measure, implemented by presidential pardon¹⁰, led to the release of numerous prisoners from the prisons in Mpimba, Ngozi, Bururi and Ruyigi¹¹.

However, these release measures were not sufficient to resolve the prison overcrowding crisis, as there is still a long way to go: as of 31 December 2025, the occupancy rate remains alarming¹². ACAT-Burundi particularly deplores the fact that certain categories of prisoners, including those accused of political offences, were excluded from these releases. Furthermore, the enforcement of court decisions remains problematic for prisoners who have already served their sentences or been officially acquitted.

Although ACAT-Burundi notes a gradual decrease in cases of torture and ill-treatment, the phenomenon persists in certain prisons. These inhuman and degrading acts are often inflicted by fellow prisoners, members of 'security committees', often acting with the complicity of certain prison officials.

Finally, other structural challenges remain: food insecurity, limited access to healthcare, dilapidated and unsanitary infrastructure, systemic corruption, and the inappropriate detention of people with mental health conditions.

This report summarises the monthly monitoring visits carried out between January and December 2025 in the prisons of Bururi, Buzanza, Bujumbura, Gitega, Muramvya, Muyinga, Ngozi, Rutana, Ruyigi and Rumonge.

Against this backdrop of persistent political tensions, a shrinking civic space and the structural fragility of judicial institutions, human rights violations continue to be documented in various regions of the country. Data collected by ACAT-Burundi during 2025 highlight the persistence of serious acts such as murders, abductions, arbitrary arrests and acts of torture. The following sections outline the main categories of violations recorded by the organisation.

⁷<https://gfmag.com/data/economic-data/poorest-country-in-the-world/>

⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/statements-and-speeches/2025/10/declaration-du-rapporteur-special-sur-la-situation-des-droits-de>

⁹<https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/2025/08/21/du-reve-demergence-a-la-realite-de-la-faim-le-burundi-a-bout-de-souffle/>

¹⁰<https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/2025/07/19/desengorgement-des-prisons-au-burundi-entre-chiffres-officiels-et-realites-troublantes/>

¹¹<https://www.acatburundi.org/liberation-des-detenus-acat-burundi-appelle-a-lequite-et-a-la-transparence/>

¹²<https://www.acatburundi.org/rapport-monitoring-prisons-acat-burundi-pour-octobre-a-decembre-2025>

III. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND ABUSES RECORDED IN 2025

Throughout 2025, ACAT-Burundi continued to monitor human rights violations.

As in previous periods, the organisation has documented cases of executions, extrajudicial killings, abductions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and attacks on physical integrity, including acts of torture.

In the majority of cases, the alleged perpetrators of these violations enjoy total impunity, as the justice system fails to conduct independent and credible investigations. Lifeless bodies, most of them unidentified, are frequently discovered across the country. Many of them are hastily buried on the orders of the authorities, without prior identification or forensic examination. These practices seriously undermine the search for the truth and hinder the identification of victims as well as the establishment of criminal responsibility. Similarly, reported cases of arbitrary detention and torture are not prosecuted, creating a climate of impunity that encourages the recurrence of such crimes. Five years after the establishment of new institutions, the phenomenon of killings and abductions persists in Burundi.

These crimes are generally attributed to the security forces, certain government officials and members of the ruling party's youth league, the "Imbonerakure".

In many documented cases, victims or their families face significant difficulties in obtaining justice. Complaints lodged with the judicial authorities are often ignored, and investigations that are opened are rarely conducted in an independent and impartial manner. This situation contributes to a climate of impunity that encourages the recurrence of such violations in various parts of the country.

III.1 Cases of murder

During 2025, ACAT-Burundi recorded 185 cases of murder. Most of these cases were not the subject of criminal investigations. Details regarding these 185 cases are set out in the various monthly reports published throughout the year. Table 1, in Annex 1 on page 37, summarises the testimonies relating to 14 of these cases, out of the 185 recorded in 2025. These acts constitute serious violations of the right to life, guaranteed in particular by the international and regional human rights instruments to which Burundi is a party. By way of illustration, the following cases may be cited:

1. *The Ngoma Hill case (Ngozi) – 6 January 2025*

The body of a woman named Pascasie was found on Ngoma Hill, in the municipality of Gashikanwa. The victim had last been seen the previous evening at around 8 pm in a pub in Ndaro. The body bore stab wounds to the ears. Despite protests from the family, who demanded that the body be transferred to the mortuary for a post-mortem examination, the local council insisted on an immediate burial, thereby hindering any judicial investigation.

2. *The Rusiga Hill case (Cibitoke) – 8 January 2025*

The decapitated body of a man aged around 40 was found in a maize field on Rusiga Hill, in the commune of Rugombo. According to witnesses, the victim was killed with a machete. On the orders of the commune administrator, Gilbert Manirakiza, members of the *Imbonerakure* militia carried out a hasty burial of the body on the same day, without a post-mortem report or prior investigation.

3. Case in the Kanyosha area (Bujumbura City Council) – 10 January 2025

Georges Bigirimana was found dead at his home on Musama Hill, Muha commune. Alerted by a smell of decomposition, neighbours forced open the door and discovered the body, which showed signs of strangulation. The victim was buried without his family's consent and without any police investigation.

4. Case of Kibogoye Hill (Gitega) – 17 January 2025

Niyomukiza Japhet, aged 22, was fatally wounded by soldiers in Itaba commune. Following a minor collision between his bicycle and a military truck, the soldiers violently beat him before stabbing him in the heart with a bayonet. A police investigator dispatched to the scene was prevented from intervening by the soldiers. The young man died of his injuries the following day at Kibuye Hospital.

5. The Kiryama Hill case (Bururi) – 10 February 2025

The body of Charles Karikurubu, a retired soldier and member of the UPRONA party, was found decomposing in a marsh in Songa. He had been missing for two weeks and had suffered severe head injuries and a partially severed arm. The local authorities ordered his immediate burial, prohibiting any investigation into the motives behind the killing.

6. Case in the commune of Muyinga (Muyinga) – 1 March 2025

Berchmas Minani, aged 32, was shot dead outside his home in the provincial capital by individuals using a pistol fitted with a silencer. Having been threatened by the *Imbonerakure* on his native hill of Kinazi over land disputes and accusations of witchcraft, he had moved away for his own safety. No investigation was opened and his family were forced to bury the body immediately.

7. Case of Murehe Hill (Muramvya) – 6 May 2025

Oscar Ndayisaba was cowardly murdered by members of the *Imbonerakure* militia led by Jodos Niyonkuru, alias 'Babu'. Abducted and taken to a wooded area on Taba Hill, he was beheaded and mutilated (genitals removed). The body was buried the same day on the orders of the local authorities without any legal proceedings.

8. Case of Kigazi Hill (Cibitoke) – 6–7 May 2025

Darius Nduwayo, aged 62, was found dead at his home in the commune of Mugwi, killed by machete blows. The local population suspects the *Imbonerakure*, who carry out night patrols in the area. As with the previous cases, no investigation was launched.

9. The Nyarugari Hill case (Nyanza-Lac) – 29 July 2025

Georgette Nishimwe and Jeanine Nyabenda were found dead in a forest. They were part of a group of four women intercepted by three *Imbonerakure* (Luc Ndikumana, Eric Ndayikeza and Jean Claude Hashariwimana). The victims were raped and then strangled. Although identified, the perpetrators were reportedly released by a local militia leader after a bribe was paid.

10. Case from the hill Jurwe (Gitega) – 23 August 2025

Mathias Mpfakurera, aged 69, was found floating in the Ruvyironza River, in the commune of Gishubi. His body, which was in a state of decomposition, was buried on the day it was discovered on Jurwe Hill, without a medical examination to determine the exact cause of death.

11. *Case of Mahwa Hill (Burunga) – 20 September 2025*

The body of a teenage girl aged around 15 was discovered on the RN16, in the Nyamuswaga Valley (Matana commune). She had head injuries caused by blunt force trauma. On administrative orders, she was buried at the site of discovery without prior identification or investigation.

12. *Case in the Ryansoro area (Gitega) – 9 November 2025*

Ntahondereye Jean Berchmas was found dead in the home of his employer, Charles Hicuburundi, in the commune of Gishubi. The body had wounds on the legs and traces of blood around the mouth. The police and local authorities ordered an immediate burial, closing the case without an investigation.

13. *Case of Macu Hill (Gitega) – 14 November 2025*

Générose Gakecuru, aged 45 and a mother of three, was found dead, her body bound, near her home. She was buried the same day, depriving her family of the opportunity to seek justice through a preliminary investigation.

14. *The Higiro Hill case (Gitega) – 3 December 2025*

Jules Ndayikeza, aged 28, was found hanged from the roof beams of his house. Evidence gathered by neighbours suggests that the victim was killed elsewhere and that the scene was staged to look like a suicide. Despite these serious doubts, the authorities had the body buried the same day without conducting an investigation.

III.2 Abductions

The phenomenon of abductions continues to be observed in Burundi, more than five years after President Evariste Ndayishimiye came to power. Having become a recurring occurrence, this phenomenon follows an almost always identical *modus operandi*.

The perpetrators of these acts are agents of the National Intelligence Service (SNR), acting in collusion with the *Imbonerakure* as well as members of the security forces (military and police). The latter carry out kidnappings targeting specific individuals.

In some cases, victims are rescued thanks to alerts from human rights organisations; others are arbitrarily imprisoned. Unfortunately, many people are never found. In some cases, these incidents bear the hallmarks of enforced disappearances, as defined by international human rights law.

Although the perpetrators of these crimes are often known, their actions are rarely the subject of criminal investigations.

In 2025, ACAT-Burundi recorded 49 cases of abduction that did not result in any legal proceedings.

By way of illustration, the following cases may be cited:

- **14 February 2025 (Kirundo):** Mr Joseph Bisharizo (alias Seyoya, aged 32) and Mr Fleury Kwizera (aged 34), both of whom sought refuge in Rwanda in 2015 and voluntarily repatriated in 2020, were abducted on Ruhehe Hill (Bugabira commune). Joseph Bisharizo was apprehended by *Imbonerakure* before being taken away in the vehicle of Pépin Habimana, the provincial head of the SNR in Kirundo. At the same time, Fleury Kwizera was arrested at his home by other members of the ruling party's youth league and taken to the same destination.

- **20 February 2025 (Gitega):** Jean de Dieu Nduwamungu (aged 49), a retired warrant officer, was abducted by SNR agents near the Brarudi branch in Gitega. Following his arrest, his captors took him back to his home at around 8.30 pm for a forced search, before leaving with him for a destination that remains unknown to this day.
- **19 March 2025 (Bujumbura):** Ciza Chrysostome, a resident of the Ngagara area, went missing after receiving a phone call. According to witnesses, he left his home to answer the call and has not been seen since. Despite his family's searches of various detention centres, his fate remains unknown.
- **23 March 2025 (Muyinga):** Schadrac Nkunuzimana was abducted on Mukoni Hill by three *Imbonerakure*, including Antoine Basabose and an individual nicknamed 'Kinyenyi'. The latter—, a driver and alleged of Shabani Nimubona (president of the league of the *Imbonerakure* youth for Buhumuza province)—took him away in a Toyota TI vehicle with tinted windows (registration number C 0444 A).
- **24 March 2025 (Gitega):** Emmanuel Mfitiye (60), a former education inspector and ex-MSD activist, was abducted as he left his home in the Musinzira neighbourhood. The operation was led by Venant Ndayishimiye, the SNR's provincial head in Gitega, who forced him into a white pick-up truck with tinted windows.
- **2 April 2025 (Bujumbura Rural):** Fidèle Nkurembone (aged 46), a trader and CNL party activist, was intercepted by SNR agents under the command of Athia Nduwimana whilst on his way to the market in Kwisamariro (Mutimbuzi commune). He was taken away in a white double-cab pick-up to an unknown destination.
- **11 August 2025 (Gitega):** A young man named Daniel (aged 30) disappeared after being brutally tortured by the police in Nyabikere. Arrested over a minor dispute in a restaurant (an unpaid bill of 1,000 FBW), he was beaten despite being in a critical condition. As local health facilities refused to treat him due to the severity of his injuries caused by the abuse, the police took him to a destination that remains unknown.
- **21 September 2025 (Bujumbura):** Audace Icoyitungiye, a retired soldier, was abducted in the Mutakura district by five police officers travelling in an unmarked van with tinted windows. The investigation suggests a close link to the earlier abduction of Benjamin Nzambimana, as a police officer had contacted the victim several times on the day of his disappearance.
- **11 November 2025 (Ruyigi):** A targeted operation led to the abduction of two people by the same vehicle with tinted windows: Mugisha Moise, a nurse at Rema Hospital, and then Ndayishimiye Juvénal, a trader at Ruyigi Central Market. Their families have received no information regarding their place of detention.
- **14 December 2025 (Gitega):** Tharcisse Ndirekuramba, a teacher and senior member of the CNL party (close to Agathon Rwasa), was abducted from his home on Kariba Hill. The alleged perpetrators are SNR agents, assisted by two local officials: Augustin (school headteacher) and Ndayizeye Sostène (legal adviser to the municipal administrator).

III.3 Cases of arbitrary or unlawful arrests

During 2025, a resurgence in arbitrary or illegal arrests was observed, particularly during the pre- and post-election periods. The Imbonerakure are among the main perpetrators of these abuses, operating in close collaboration with the police.

In 2025, ACAT-Burundi recorded 125 cases of arbitrary or unlawful arrests, a figure that falls far short of the reality, as many incidents go unreported for fear of reprisals. These practices reflect the abusive use of detention as an instrument of political control, particularly during sensitive periods such as election campaigns.

For example:

- **14 January 2025 (Makamba):** Mr **Fabien Nijimbere** and Mr **Antoine Mbabare**, mobilisation officers for the Conseil des Patriotes (CDP) party, were arrested by the police in Mabanda. They were accused of holding an illegal meeting, despite having a permit signed by the Makamba district administrator, **Jean Belly Hatungimana**. After an initial detention in Mabanda, they were transferred to the Makamba provincial police station on 16 January.
- **January–February 2025 (Wave of arrests of doctors):** A series of arrests targeted the medical profession. Dr **Nazaire Ndereyimana** (Mwaro) was arrested on 27 January in Bujumbura whilst on a mission. He was followed, on 30 January, by Dr **Pierre Claver Ruragahiye** (Rutana), Dr **Achel Igiraneza** (Kayanza) and Dr **Désiré Congera** (Bubanza). On 31 January, Dr **Polycarpe Ntakiyiruta** (Ngozi) suffered the same fate, followed on 6 February by Dr **Aimable Ndabereye**, who was summoned by telephone to the SNR headquarters. These six doctors were finally released on 12 February 2025.
- **13 February 2025 (Rumonge):** Four Ugandan nationals (**Cabura John, Ajuna Robert, Barijuka Hillary Gahwa and Kasaija Enock**) were arrested without a warrant at a hotel in Magara (Bugarama commune). Although they were in compliance with immigration regulations (holding valid visas and documents), they were unlawfully detained at the local police station before being released a few days later.
- **26 February 2025 (Rutana):** Sixteen Congolese refugees, including six minors, were arrested by the Giharo police whilst playing sport on the outskirts of the Musenyi camp. After being questioned and then transferred to the provincial capital of Rutana, their relatives denounced these detentions as arbitrary, given the lack of evidence of wrongdoing.
- **24 March 2025 (Mwaro):** **Tharcisse Nshimirimana**, a teacher and provincial youth representative for the CNL party (pro-Agathon Rwaswa), was arrested without a warrant by the Kayokwe police. Local sources claim that this arrest was motivated by his political affiliation.
- **8 April 2025 (Gitega):** **Désiré Hatungimana** (aged 32), a member of the CNL, was arrested in the commune of Makebuko. Ironically, he had gone to the police station to file a complaint against the local CNDD-FDD official, **Emmanuel Ntibashirakandi**, who had accused him, without evidence, of organising clandestine meetings and possessing leaflets hostile to the Head of State.
- **21 April 2025 (Bujumbura):** Two journalists, **Willy Kwizera** (Radio Bonesha FM) and **Ahmed Masudi Mugiraneza** (Radio scolaire Nderagakura), were arrested by the SNR and the police at Kinama market. They were covering a peaceful sit-in by microfinance clients

“Ineza”. Despite presenting their press cards, they were detained at the municipal police station along with around 50 demonstrators before being released that same evening.

- **13 June 2025 (Bujumbura Airport):** Three human rights defenders and community leaders, **Florence Rutamucero** (Kibimba), **André Bizoza** (ALM-Buta) and the expert **Elvis Nshimirimana**, were arrested at Melchior Ndadaye Airport. They were preparing to travel to Nairobi for a regional peace conference. Detained at the Jabe detention centre without clear cause, they were released on 16 June.
- **15 June 2025 (Burunga):** **Father Paul Butoyi** was arrested by the SNR in Gitaza (Muhuta commune). He was accused of making remarks during previous elections that had displeased the authorities. He was detained near Regina Mundi Cathedral before being released a few days later.
- **2 December 2025 (Ngozi):** **Cyprien Sindayihebura**, a phytosanitary inspector, was detained by the SNR in Ngozi. His arrest reportedly followed his professional refusal to authorise the entry of products that did not comply with BBN standards, belonging to an influential trader. He was released after a few days.

III.4 Cases of torture

Although a gradual decline in the number of cases of torture was observed during 2025, the practice remains a cause for concern. These acts, perpetrated in a climate of widespread impunity, are mainly carried out by law enforcement agencies and SNR agents, often acting in concert with the Imbonerakure militia. These acts constitute serious violations of the absolute prohibition on torture, enshrined in international law, notably the Convention against Torture.

In most cases, acts of torture are committed against, or are alleged to have been committed by, opposition groups.

ACAT-Burundi has documented 42 cases of torture during this period, the majority of which targeted actual or suspected members of the opposition. To date, the perpetrators of these acts/violations have not been prosecuted.

By way of illustration, the following cases may be cited:

- **15 January 2025 (Kayanza):** Mr **Lazare Bigirimana** (aged 42), a member of the CNL party, was violently beaten with concrete reinforcing bars by members of *the Imbonerakure*. The attack, which took place on Kavumu Hill, is reported to have been ordered by the Kayanza municipal administrator, **Godfroid Niyonizeye**. The victim was accused of recruiting members for the opposition, leading to a loss of support for the CNDD-FDD party. Following an illegal search of his home, his condition required emergency hospitalisation.
- **16 January 2025 (Gitega):** A motorbike taxi driver named **Désiré** died from his injuries after being tortured by police officers in the Shatanya neighbourhood. The officers are said to have attempted to seize his motorbike by force. Despite resistance from witnesses and his transfer to Ubuzima Hospital, the victim died as a result of the blows he received.
- **17 January 2025 (Bururi):** Mr **Fidel Nkurunziza** (a member of the UPRONA party) and **Jean Claude Nduwayezu** were beaten up by two *Imbonerakure* (Bertrand Nkurunziza and Buringo) in the Rumonyi neighbourhood. The order is said to have been given by **Jules Singayimana**, the local CNDD-FDD official. Accused of embezzlement in connection with the sale of Brarudi products, they were arbitrarily detained at the provincial police station by Commissioner **Dismas Mazuru** before being released the following day.

- **7 March 2025 (Makamba): Bonaventure Ndikuriyo** (a member of the CNL) was subjected to cruel and inhuman acts of torture on Kiyange Hill. Under the orders of hill chief **Felix Manirakiza**, members of *the Imbonerakure* beat him with sticks and concrete reinforcing bars, before forcing him to ingest his own faeces. These acts of extreme cruelty went unpunished.
- **15 July 2025 (Burunga/Nyanza-Lac):** A 12-year-old boy named **Steve** was tortured by an SNR officer named **Janvier**. The reason given was the boy's failure to find an item in a shop for the officer. The boy was illegally detained for several days before being released.
- On **13 August 2025, Ruhegwe Patrice**, a mechanic and member of UPRONA, was tortured by Imbonerakure led by Viateur Ndayisaba, in the bar owned by Ndayisenga Élie, located on Ruhehe Hill, Bugabira area, Kirundo commune, Butanyerera province. According to local sources, the attack reportedly occurred following Patrice Ruhegwe's opposition to the Imbonerakure during political discussions. The victim was seriously injured and admitted to Kirundo Hospital.
- **23 August 2025 (Burunga/Musongati) : Gervais Hakizimana** a was tortured by *Imbonerakure* under the orders of hill chief **Vincent Nemerimana** and local CNDD-FDD official **Bernard Ntirandekura**. Accused of conducting an election campaign outside the permitted period, he was released with orders to 'disappear'. His complaint to the Giharo police station was rejected by the police.
- **15 September 2025 (Burunga/Musongati):** A punitive raid targeted the family of **Théoneste Juma** (UPRONA official). He, his wife Judith and their three minor children were violently beaten by *Imbonerakure*. Although the attackers cited family disputes, Mr Juma's political past (as a former member of the CNDD-FDD) suggests targeted persecution. No investigation has been opened.
- **1 December 2025 (Bujumbura/Mpanda):** The head of the Cabiza district, **Franck Mpawenimana**, was attacked by members of *the Imbonerakure* led by a man named **Dany**. He was trampled on and beaten for attempting to ban public gambling. He was admitted to hospital in a critical condition.

IV. PRISON CONDITIONS IN BURUNDI

IV.1. Persistent and growing prison overcrowding.

During 2025, ACAT-Burundi's monitoring of violations of prisoners' rights revealed that all prisons in Burundi continue to face the problem of overcrowding, as in previous periods.

The persistence of arbitrary detention, failure to comply with measures ordered by judges, combined with the slow processing of defendants' cases, is one of the main causes of these alarming figures, which far exceed the official capacities of the prisons in Bubanza, Mpimba, Muramvya, Ngozi, Gitega and Ruyigi.

It is the prisons overflowing with political prisoners where the highest rates of prison overcrowding are found, such as the prisons in Muramvya, Mpimba, Gitega and Ngozi.

The data on prison overcrowding presented in this report demonstrate a massive structural gap between the official capacity of prisons and the actual prison population, reaching rates of over 950% in some cases. This situation makes it physically impossible to meet minimum standards of hygiene, health and human dignity.

The prison population as at 31 December 2025 stood at **12,749** inmates, of whom **6,157** were remand prisoners, whilst the number of convicted prisoners was **6,592**. Among this prison population, there were **93** infants **and** **186** minors, whilst the total capacity of all prisons is **4,294** prisoners; a considerably high occupancy rate, reaching **296.90%** of capacity. For reference, Tables 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the prison population figures for October, November and December 2025.

A comparative analysis of prison populations in December 2023, 2024 and 2025 (see Table 4 and Figure 1) highlights chronic overcrowding. This is the result of ineffective measures to reduce overcrowding and structural delays in judicial proceedings.

Table 1: Prison population figures as at 31 October 2025 (Total: 12,129 prisoners/detainees).

House Detention Centre	Reception Capacity	Total of prisoners	Number of remand prisoners	Number of convicted prisoners	Occupancy of occupancy
BUBANZA	200	402 with 8 infants	177 men and 19 F	188 men and 18 women	201.00%
BURURI	250	294 with 2 infants	158 men and 17 F	107 men and 12 women	117.60%
GITEGA	400	1,297 including 12 infants	481 H and 68 F	654 M and 94 F	324.25%
MPIMBA	800	4,076 including 16 infants	2,363 H and 210 F	1450H and 53 F	509.50%
MURAMVYA	100	952, with 11 infants	410H and 27 F	466H and 49 F	952.00%

MUYINGA	300	552 with 4 infants	126 H and 14 F	364 males and 48 females	184.00%
NGOZI WOMEN	250	202, with 25 minors and 21 infants	79 women and 10 men	98 women and 15 men	80.80%
NGOZI MEN	400	1,712	642	1070	428.00%
RUMONGE	800	1423	484 H and 34 F	857 M and 47 F	177.88%
RUTANA	350	478 with 1 infant	220 hours and 15 F	237 men and 6 women	136.57%
RUYIGI	300	716 with 3 infants	298 H and 25 F	349 men and 44 women	238.00%

Table 2: Prison population figures as at 30 November 2025 (Total: 12,386 prisoners/detainees).

Detention Centre	Reception Capacity	Total of prisoners	Number of remand prisoners	Number of convicted prisoners	Occupancy of occupancy
BUBANZA	200	417 including 8 infants	193 H and 20 F	186 M and 18 F	208.50%
BURURI	250	284 including 2 infants	147, H, and 19 F	106 M and 12 F	113.60%
GITEGA	400	1,333, including 12 infants	523 H and 73 F	644 males and 93 females	333.25%
MPIMBA	800	4,159 including 13 infants	2322 M and 205 F	1561 M and 71 F	519.88%
MURAMVYA	100	946 including 10 infants	374, M and 25 F	497 M and 50 F	946.00%
MUYINGA	300	570 including 6 infants	111, M and 15 F	394 M and 50 F	190.00%

NGOZI WOMEN	250	181 adults with 25 minors and 25 infants	80 women and 10 men	101 women and 15 men	82.40%
NGOZI MALE	400	1,773	695	1078	443.25%
RUMONGE	800	1446	475, H , and 35 F	886 men and 50 women	180.75%
RUTANA	350	474 including 1 infant	218, M and 12 F	237 M and 7 F	135.43%
RUYIGI	300	753 including 5 infants	318, M and 27 F	363 M and 45 F	251.00%

Table 3: Prison population as at 31 December 2025 (Total: 12,749 prisoners/detainees).

Remand Centre	Reception capacity	Total of prisoners	Number of remand prisoners	Number of convicted prisoners	Excess in percentage
BUBANZA	200	428, with 10 infants	198M and 22F	188 M and 20 F	214.00%
BURURI	250	283 with 2 infants	141 men and 17 women	113M and 12F	113.20%
GITEGA	400	1,339 including 13 infants	524 M and 73 F	648 M and 94 F	334.75%
MPIMBA	800	4,176 including 16 infants	2360 H and 210 F	1,534 M and 72 F	522.00%
MURAMVYA	100	974 including 12 infants	383 M and 31 F	511 M and 49 F	974.00%
MUYINGA	300	591 including 8 infants	123 M and 13 F	401 M and 54 F	197.3%
NGOZI WOMAN	250	189 adults with 24 minors and 23 infants	88 women and 11 men	101 women and 13 men	85.2%
NGOZI MEN	400	1,858	781	1077	464.5%
RUMONGE	800	1,465 including 3 infants	496 M and 38 F	882 M and 49 F	18 3.125%
RUTANA	350	478	227 M and 12 F	232 M and 7 F	136.57%
RUYIGI	300	782 with 6 infants	314 M and 34 F	385 M and 49 F	260.66%

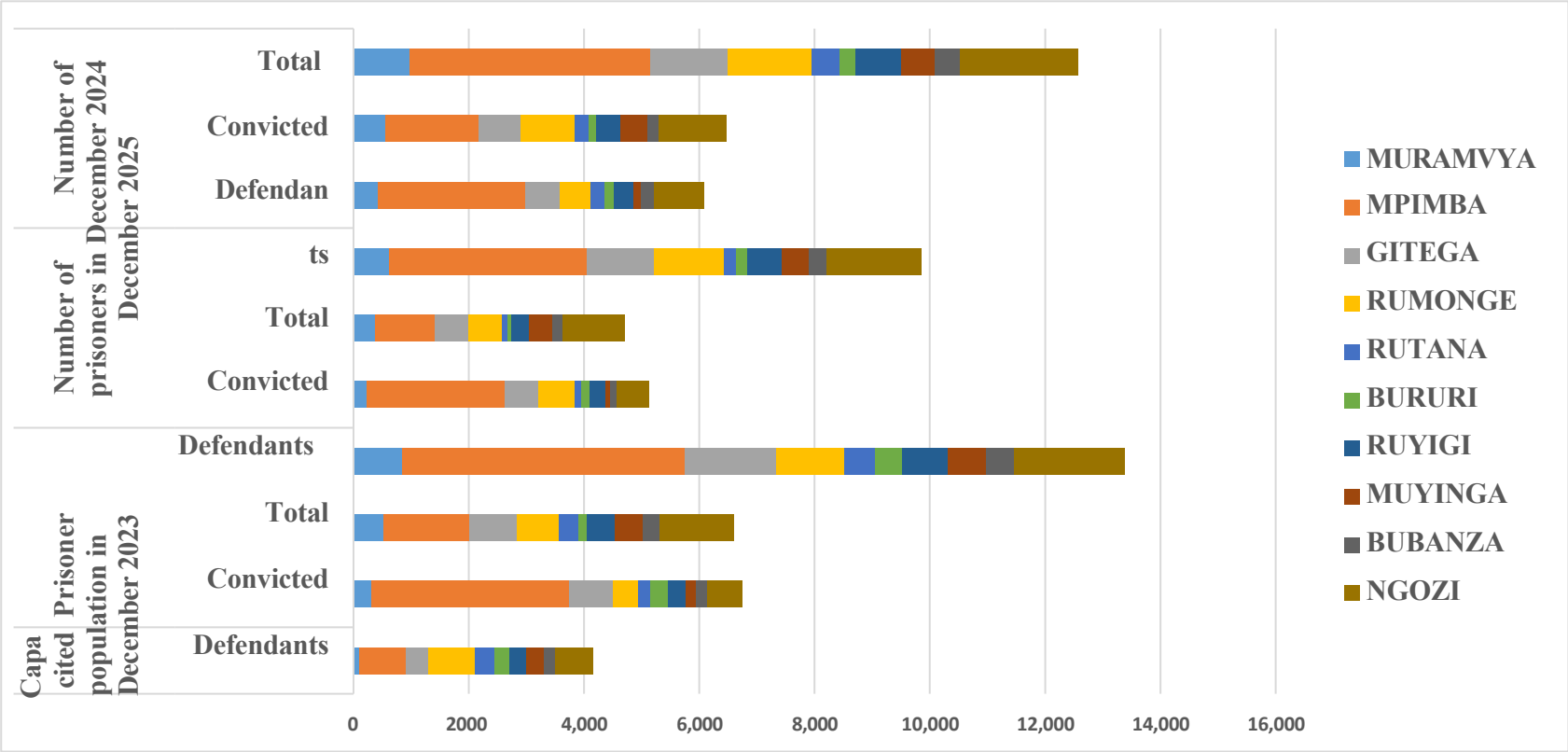
The following table illustrates prison overcrowding by comparing statistics for the months of December 2023, 2024 and 2025, due to the limited scope of prisoner release measures and the slow processing of court cases

Table IV: Comparison of prison populations in December 2023, 2024 and 2025

Remand Centre	Capacity	Prisoner numbers in December 2023			Prisoner numbers in December 2024			Prisoner population in December 2025		
		<i>Defendants</i>	<i>Convicted prisoners</i>	<i>Total</i>	Remand prisoners	Convicted	Total	<i>Defendants</i>	<i>Convicted</i>	<i>Total</i>
MURAMVYA	100	316	527	843	236	382	618	414	560	974
MPIMBA	800	3428	1486	4914	2392	1037	3429	2570	1606	4176
GITEGA	400	758	820	1578	590	574	1164	597	742	1340
RUMONGE	800	437	742	1179	620	594	1214	534	931	1465
RUTANA	350	208	326	534	122	82	204	239	239	478
BURURI	250	309	147	466	139	71	210	158	125	283
RUYIGI	300	309	485	794	275	307	582	348	434	782
MUYINGA	300	174	493	667	86	396	482	136	455	591
BUBANZA	200	188	294	482	112	189	301	220	208	428
NGOZI	650	612	1283	1924	564	1073	1637	869	1178	2047

NB: infant figures have not been included.

Figure 1: Illustration of prison overcrowding in December 2023, 2024 and 2025



IV.2 Analysis of the data collected

This summary highlights an alarming acceleration in prison overcrowding in Burundi, marking a continuous deterioration in detention conditions towards the end of the year.

1. Overall trend in prison population

Over the last three months of 2025, the prison population grew steadily:

- October: 12,129 prisoners (Average occupancy rate: ~292%)
- November: 12,339 prisoners (+210 compared with October)
- December: 12,853 prisoners (+514 compared to November)
- Quarterly summary: A net increase of 724 prisoners in just 60 days, an average of 12 new admissions per day.

2. Analysis of critical overcrowding hotspots

Three institutions illustrate the failure of decongestion measures:

- Muramvya (The record for unsanitary conditions): Occupancy rose from 952% to 974%. This prison is operating at nearly 10 times its theoretical capacity, a unique and humanly unsustainable situation.
- Mpimba (The burden of the capital): With 4,176 inmates in December (522%), it alone accounts for 32.5% of the country's entire prison population.
- Ngozi Homme: A dramatic surge in December (464.5%), marking increased judicial pressure in the north.

3. Judicial Dysfunctions (Defendants vs Convicted Prisoners)

Overcrowding is fuelled by the excessive use of pre-trial detention:

- In Mpimba, the number of defendants (awaiting trial) consistently exceeds that of convicted prisoners (61% of defendants in December).
- This trend is becoming widespread in Bubanza and Gitega, demonstrating that the slow processing of court cases is the main cause of the backlog.

4. Humanitarian emergency: Vulnerable populations

The quarter ends with an alarming rise in the number of children in prison:

- Infants: The number of infants living in cells rose from 86 in October to 103 in December (+20%).
- Minors: The constant presence of 24 to 25 minors at Ngozi Women's Prison confirms the lack of rehabilitation alternatives for young people.

In conclusion: the final quarter of 2025 demonstrates that release mechanisms (pardons, parole) are completely overwhelmed by the influx of new committal orders. Without a fundamental reform of criminal policy prioritising alternative sentences and a speeding up of trials, the Burundian prison system is heading for a major logistical and health crisis in 2026.

IV.3 Corruption in prisons

Systemic corruption within Burundian prisons severely disadvantages prisoners, in a situation already exacerbated by overcrowding and poor management. The practices observed point to a system in which financial considerations take precedence over the fundamental rights and dignity of those incarcerated.

On 23 July 2025, at **Mpimba Central Prison**, several inmates reported the existence of an illegal trade in prison cells. The wealthiest prisoners secure the best locations, relegating the poorest to the dark corridors known as '*Kirongozi*'. The fees demanded range from 3 to 7 million Burundian francs (Fbu). This trafficking leads to the forced eviction of former occupants to make way for new arrivals willing to pay more.

This racketeering scheme is reportedly orchestrated and organised by certain internal officials, notably Zarbaber Kantungeko, Clovis Cimpaye and Tony Uwizeye, under the passive gaze of the prison management. Prisoners who attempt to expose these abuses, such as the one nicknamed "Kado", face severe reprisals, including solitary confinement and various arbitrary disciplinary measures.

These facts not only bear witness to institutionalised corruption within the prison administration, but also constitute a flagrant abuse of authority. They seriously undermine the principle of equal treatment of prisoners and violate minimum/international standards regarding respect for human dignity in detention. This situation exacerbates inequalities between prisoners and further undermines respect for human dignity within the prison system.

The situation is the same in several prisons across the country, as observed on 24 August 2025:

1. In **Ngozi**: a simple 1.60-metre mattress can cost up to **300,000 Burundian francs**. In **Ruyigi**: access to a plot of land costs between **70,000 and 150,000 Burundian francs**, not including illegal 'registration' and 'security' fees.
2. In **Muramvya**: designed for 100 inmates but currently housing around **1,200**, the prison offers so-called 'VIP' spaces for **140,000 Burundian francs**. The poorest sleep under beds or in unsanitary corridors.
3. In **Rumonge**: a cramped space can cost up to **200,000 Burundian francs**. Those who cannot afford it are forced to sleep on the floor or outside, exposed to the cold and insects.

These practices, sometimes orchestrated with the complicity of prison officials, illustrate the appalling conditions of detention and highlight the urgent need for concrete measures to reduce prison overcrowding and restore fairness in the management of detention facilities

In general, the accommodation of prisoners is the responsibility of the State; the authorities must take the necessary measures to address this kind of organised theft.

4. The urgency of a state response

These practices, characterised by abuse of authority and administrative collusion, constitute a flagrant violation of the principle of equal treatment and international standards on detention. As the accommodation of prisoners is a sovereign obligation, it is imperative that the Burundian State take urgent measures to dismantle these organised theft networks, relieve overcrowding in prisons and restore the integrity of the prison system.

IV.4 Right to and access to food

The right to food for prisoners is enshrined in international and regional legal instruments, notably the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (Article 25), the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (Article 11), the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Article 22), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which has recognised the right to food as part of the Charter since 2001.

These texts stipulate that the food provided must be sufficient in quantity, but also adequate in terms of quality and nutritional value.

1. Overview of the first quarter of 2025

At the start of 2025, the food situation showed marked disparities between different regions :

- **Stable supplies:** The prisons in **Ruyigi**, **Ngozi** and **Rumonge** received regular deliveries in January and February, ensuring a degree of food security.
- **Logistical disruptions:** Conversely, other centres experienced critical shortages. At **Mpimba** Prison (Bujumbura), irregularities in the distribution of beans and a shortage of firewood were reported in late January. **Gitega** Prison also faced this shortage of fuel, hindering meal preparation.

2. Analysis of the period July–September 2025

Data collected by ACAT-Burundi reveals a contrasting reality between the maintenance of rations and the deterioration in their sanitary quality.

By way of illustration, here is the situation at certain institutions:

- a. **Ruyigi Prison:** food rations were deemed to be regular and sufficient during this period.
- b. **Gitega Prison:** inmates received the minimum prescribed amount, with no notable improvement.

- c. **Mpimba Central Prison:** meals were distributed almost daily, with the exception of **23 July 2025**, when the firewood arrived late. However, the quality of the beans served remained poor.
- d. **Ngozi Prison:** meals were provided, but persistent water shortages compromised food hygiene and the health of the prisoners.
- e. **Muramvya Prison:** whilst the flour was edible, the spoiled beans were often rejected by the prisoners, and rations remained insufficient to meet their nutritional needs. By the end of September 2025, flour was no longer available: prisoners received only poor-quality beans. The situation there is the most alarming. Inmates often reject the spoiled beans, and rations are insufficient to meet basic nutritional needs. By the end of September, the shortage of flour had forced prisoners to consume only poor-quality beans. Whilst the regularity of distributions is generally maintained, the shortcomings in quality and the logistical failures observed in several institutions constitute a clear violation of prisoners' right to decent, sufficient and balanced food.

IV.5 The right to health and access to medical care

Although the right to health is guaranteed by the Constitution of Burundi and ratified international instruments, its implementation in prisons remains alarmingly poor. However, in various institutions across the country, this right is systematically undermined, particularly for prisoners requiring specialist care.

1. Legal framework and the State's obligations

The law governing the prison system in Burundi stipulates that the prison administration must provide healthcare to prisoners in every prison. It further stipulates that a doctor appointed by the Ministry of Public Health must regularly monitor the functioning of the health service and the application of health regulations within the prison system.

Article 25 of the Nelson Mandela Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners requires the doctor to submit a report to the governor whenever he or she considers that a prisoner's physical or mental health has been or will be affected by the prolongation or any aspect of detention. The doctor is also responsible for monitoring the physical and mental health of prisoners.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, for its part, advocates non-discrimination in relation to the right to health. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights specifically recommends the obligation to respect the right to health, in particular by refraining from denying or restricting equal access. Thus, these laws and guidelines indicate that persons deprived of their liberty must enjoy the same standard of health as those at liberty.

However, prison authorities deny this right to certain prisoners, particularly those prosecuted for political offences, as well as prisoners who require care that is not provided within prisons.

2. Illustrative cases of serious violations:

- a) **Fatal negligence at Gitega Prison:** On 23 February 2025, **Innocent Ndiwokubwayo** died following a sudden deterioration in his health. Despite repeated alerts from his fellow inmates from 1 am onwards, the prison governor, **Colonel Salomon Nduwayezu**, refused to authorise his emergency evacuation. Suffering from a chronic condition, the deceased was also deprived of an appropriate diet, a factor that contributed to his death.
- b) **Political discrimination in healthcare:** Since March 2025, in Gitega, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience have been systematically denied transfer to specialist hospitals. The administration justifies these blockades on the grounds of alleged ‘risks of escape’ or a lack of prison staff, thereby making security an obstacle to the right to life.
- c) **Medical distress and destitution (Ngozi Prison):** ACAT-Burundi is concerned about the fate of **Donatien Nsabimana**. Although paralysed and initially hospitalised, he was forced to return to his cell in November 2025 due to a lack of financial means to cover his medical expenses. This case illustrates the state’s total failure to provide care for indigent prisoners.
- d) **Incompatibility of detention and mental health:** At Bururi Prison, the case of **Éric Iradukunda**, who suffers from severe mental health issues without specialist care, remains a cause for concern. The standard prison environment is unsuitable for his condition and exacerbates his vulnerability.
- e) **Structural shortages (July – September 2025):** An almost total shortage of essential medicines has been observed in the clinics in **Mpimba, Bururi** and **Ngozi**. Compounding this health crisis is a recurring shortage of fuel for ambulances, making any medical evacuation highly unlikely, if not impossible.

These failures reflect the State’s failure to fulfil its obligation to guarantee effective access to healthcare for persons deprived of their liberty.

IV.6 Prison facilities and hygiene

The infrastructure of some prisons in Burundi is dilapidated and unsanitary, and hygiene remains a major problem. Prisons generally lack adequate infrastructure to accommodate the large number of inmates they hold. Inmates live in particularly precarious conditions, exposing them to serious health risks and the rapid spread of infectious diseases.

Under these conditions, prisoners are exposed to serious health risks that are incompatible with international standards regarding the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty.

3. Situation by institution:

1. **Mpimba Central Prison:** The deterioration of the sanitary facilities is alarming. The absence of doors in the showers and toilets not only violates the inmates’ privacy and modesty, but also condemns them to live in a foul-smelling and unsanitary environment, seriously undermining their dignity.
2. **Ruyigi Prison:** The men’s quarters are in a state of advanced disrepair. Given the cramped conditions in the cells, the prison administration has been forced to repurpose the internal Pentecostal church from its original function to house inmates, illustrating a critical shortage of living space.
3. **Bururi Prison:** The shortage of hygiene supplies is compounded by major technical failures in the facilities. For over 260 inmates, only six toilets and four showers are

partially functional. The plumbing, which is out of order, is never repaired. In the women's wing, conditions are utterly unsanitary: the indoor toilets are out of service and constant water leaks exacerbate the waste and dampness in the premises.

4. **Muramvya Prison:** Living conditions there are particularly inhumane. The leaky roof leaves prisoners directly exposed to the elements. In addition to the lack of privacy in the toilets and the poor condition of the bedding, there is a severe water shortage: prisoners have access to water no more than three times a week, making personal hygiene and food hygiene impossible.

It is therefore clear that access to decent sanitary conditions remains a major challenge in several prisons in Burundi, in violation of national and international standards regarding the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty.

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules) provide, in particular, for the separation of remand prisoners from convicted prisoners, permanent access to drinking water, decent sanitary facilities, supervision exclusively provided by the prison administration, and medical care equivalent to that available to the general population.

5. **Legal and normative analysis**

This situation contravenes the Nelson Mandela Rules (United Nations Standard Minimum Rules), which require States to provide:

Decent sanitation facilities enabling people to relieve themselves in a clean and private manner;

Permanent access to drinking water and hygiene products necessary for health;

Heated and ventilated detention facilities that meet hygiene standards (including roofs in good condition).

The contrast between these international standards and the reality observed by ACAT-Burundi demonstrates a serious failure by the Burundian State to fulfil its obligations.

V. PRISON ADMINISTRATION IN BURUNDI

Prison administration falls under the remit of the Directorate-General for Prison Affairs in Burundi. Under Law No. 1/24 of 14 December 2017 revising the prison system, the prison governor is the head of the prison. He is responsible for implementing all court decisions, handling prisoners' complaints, and ensuring security and hygiene.

Other services are available in prisons, namely the legal service, which handles all legal matters relating to prisoners and keeps them informed of their legal status, and a social service which contributes to the moral rehabilitation of prisoners through various activities preparing them for social reintegration upon release, in accordance with the Internal Prison Regulations of 30 June 2004.

They ensure prisoners' meals, their conduct, access to healthcare, the organisation of leave and visits, and the organisation of all activities carried out within the prisons.

Persons deprived of their liberty must be treated on an equal footing, with due regard for vulnerable groups, as required by the law governing prisons.

As part of their duties, prison governors are required to refer matters to the competent courts to rule on the pre-trial detention of inmates admitted to their institutions in the event of failure by the Public Prosecutor's Office, in accordance with Article 343 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Despite the clarity of the regulatory provisions, ACAT-Burundi still deplores the fact that, in 2025, arbitrary detention and ill-treatment persist in several of the country's prisons. This situation continues amidst widespread indifference, and even with the complicity of the prison administration. The organisation condemns the inaction of those in charge regarding the plight of detainees held in violation of the law and the violence suffered by others, in total disregard of the rules in force.

This situation highlights a significant gap between the existing legal framework and its effective implementation.

V.1 Arbitrary and illegal detentions

In Burundi, illegal detention remains a systemic practice. It particularly affects a category of detainees prosecuted for 'undermining the internal security of the state' (ASIE) and "membership of armed groups" (PBA), charges that are often brought against these prisoners in an abusive and indiscriminate manner. These abuses have been documented by ACAT-Burundi, particularly in the prisons of Ruyigi, Mpimba, Muramvya and Gitega.

1. The cases recorded fall into several categories of violations:

- a) **Detention without trial:** Citizens languish in prison for years without ever appearing before a judge. This is the case of Christian Butoyi, imprisoned in Mpimba since 2014, and of Désiré and Fleury, detained in Muramvya for over a year without trial for their alleged membership of the Red Tabara movement. Political prisoners and those prosecuted in connection with the 2015 protests, who remain in prison despite having been acquitted or having served their full sentences.

- b) **Illegal continued detention following acquittal or completion of sentence:** Many political prisoners or individuals linked to the 2015 protests remain in prison despite an acquittal or the completion of their sentence. Prisoners who have received a presidential pardon but who nevertheless remain in detention.
- c) **Failure to implement the presidential pardon:** Detainees who have been granted presidential clemency remain deprived of their liberty.
- d) **Detention outside the judicial framework:** Individuals are imprisoned without any judicial case having been brought against them.
- e) **People who have been granted provisional release** but remain in prison due to documents known as ‘re-arrest warrants’, even though they were never actually released. This is particularly the case for **Minani Gordosie and Ntibandaba Rachel**, who have had three decisions granting provisional release and two re-arrest warrants issued against them.
- f) **The ploy of “re-arrest warrants”:** People granted provisional release remain in their cells following the issuance of re-arrest warrants, without ever having left the prison gates. Minani Gordosie and Ntibandaba Rachel illustrate this abuse, having accumulated three decisions for release and two simultaneous re-arrest warrants.
- g) **Discrimination in parole decisions:** The relevant commission systematically excludes political prisoners from consideration for sentence remission, depriving them of any hope of release.
- h) **Judicial harassment: the case of Sandra Muhoza.** Illegally detained despite a ruling by the Mukaza Court of Appeal recognising the public prosecutor’s lack of territorial jurisdiction, the journalist remained behind bars for around two years (she was released on 27 February 2026). Her lawyer had emphasised that this decision effectively overturns her initial 21-month prison sentence for ‘undermining territorial integrity’ and ‘racial hatred’, following mere exchanges on WhatsApp.

2. Legal analysis and administrative obstacles

A survey conducted by ACAT-Burundi in prisons in 2025 reveals that unlawful detention remains a reality, despite the clarity of the Burundian Code of Criminal Procedure. The finding is that court rulings in favour of these categories of detainees frequently meet with resistance from prison authorities and the public prosecutor’s office when they are implemented.

Yet Burundi’s legal framework is clear and unambiguous on the subject of detention, even if its implementation remains patchy:

Article 39 of the Constitution of the Republic of Burundi states as follows: ‘No one may be deprived of their liberty except in accordance with the law’

The Code of Criminal Procedure provides as follows:

Article 154: “Freedom being the rule and detention the exception ...”

Article 179: "...the order to release a defendant from pre-trial detention shall be issued by the judge no later than two days following the decision granting such release, and the Public Prosecutor's Office shall execute it within a period not exceeding seven days"

Article 262: "A defendant who, at the time of sentencing, is in pre-trial detention and who is acquitted or sentenced to a simple fine shall be released immediately, notwithstanding any appeal, unless he is detained for another reason."

Article 342: "Upon expiry of the principal sentence, the convicted person shall be released ..."

The provisions cited above thus unequivocally demonstrate the clarity of Burundian positive law regarding the fate of acquitted detainees, those who have served their sentences, and those who have been granted provisional release by orders issued by the courts and tribunals. However, their application in favour of certain detainees remains problematic.

V.2. Persistence of inhuman and degrading treatment in prisons

During 2025, whilst a slight decrease in cases of physical abuse against prisoners was observed in some of the country's prisons, the situation remains alarming at Mpimba Prison. Serious human rights violations are observed there, notably sexual violence and abuse, as well as acts of systematic intimidation against prisoners.

A system of terror established by illegal auxiliaries: inmates at Mpimba Central Prison, located in the Musaga area of Muha commune, in the municipality of Bujumbura, have reported persecution which they attribute to an inmate entrusted with internal security responsibilities. The individual in question is Ezéchiel Ndayiyeze, nicknamed 'Tiger', who is accused of having created a climate of fear and terror within the prison.

According to consistent accounts gathered by ACAT-Burundi, he leads a group of around forty young people from the **Imbonerakure** militia within the prison itself.

- This group operates with complete impunity, committing daily abuses:
- **Militarisation of the prison environment:** Permanent patrols and the organisation of daily military parades at around 4 pm.
- **Usurpation of duties:** These individuals act in place of prison officers to carry out arbitrary searches and confiscate prisoners' mobile phones.
- **Physical and psychological violence:** Systematic use of intimidation and beatings to maintain control.

1. The scandal of sexual violence

Even more seriously, Ezéchiel Ndayiyeze is accused of repeated **sexual abuse** against female prisoners. These crimes are said to take place on the premises of the women's section's health centre. Victims who attempt to resist face physical reprisals of extreme violence.

2. State responsibility and ACAT-Burundi's actions

In light of the seriousness of these allegations, ACAT-Burundi has issued several alerts, notably on the social media platform X, to raise awareness among the national and international communities. This initiative is part of ACAT-Burundi's mandate to prevent torture and combat all forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. ACAT-Burundi reiterates that, in accordance with national and international law, the Burundian State remains responsible for any violation committed against persons deprived of their liberty, including where such violations are perpetrated by detainees acting with the tolerance, complicity or inaction of the prison authorities.

3. Call to action by detainees

It is imperative that the judicial and administrative authorities intervene as a matter of urgency to:

- ☞ Put an end to the hidden power of ‘Tiger’ and his militia.
- ☞ Bring criminal proceedings against those suspected of violence and sexual abuse.
- ☞ Restore law and order and guarantee the physical and psychological safety of all detainees.

VI. URGENT APPEALS

VI.1. Call on the Burundian authorities to ensure the appropriate care of mentally ill prisoners held in various prisons across the country.

Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture in Burundi (ACAT-Burundi) has been deeply concerned by the alarming situation of detainees with mental health conditions in the country's prisons. The situation is particularly critical at Mpimba Central Prison, where more than fifty (50) detainees suffering from mental illness have been identified.

The case of **Christian Butoyi**, who has been imprisoned since 8 September 2014, prosecuted for the murder of three Italian nuns in 2014 and detained without a case file, is emblematic in this regard. Although his severe mental health issues are public knowledge, he remains deprived of any appropriate care. This case illustrates the persistent negligence and bad faith of the judicial and prison authorities in the management of sick prisoners.

ACAT-Burundi has pointed out that Burundian law provides a favourable framework for the management of mental health conditions in detention through the Constitution, the Prison Act, the Criminal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and mental health legislation, all of which are based on international standards. Despite a few isolated medical initiatives, the overall care provided to these vulnerable detainees remains largely inadequate. Their situation requires increased and coordinated attention on medical, judicial and social levels.

With regard to living conditions, **the lack of appropriate dietary regimes** is alarming, particularly for prisoners undergoing intensive treatment. In the event of food shortages, their inability to feed themselves properly exposes them to **immediate life-threatening risks**.

The lack of family support and reintegration schemes for former prisoners with mental health conditions exacerbates their vulnerability upon release from prison. In light of this, ACAT-Burundi makes the following recommendations:

In light of this, ACAT-Burundi makes the following recommendations to the government:

Area of action	Recommended measures	Target objective
Health & Nutrition	Immediate improvement in medical, nutritional and social care.	Ensuring the survival and dignity of prisoners with mental health conditions.
Justice & Law	Establishment of appropriate legal procedures and effective access to legal representation.	Ensure fair treatment that respects their psychological vulnerability.
Releases	Immediate enforcement of release orders for those who have served their sentences.	End arbitrary detention, prioritising cases of extreme vulnerability.
Reintegration	Establishment of post-release support programmes (housing, psychological support).	Prevent homelessness and reoffending among former prisoners without family support.

International Framework	Compliance with the Convention against Torture and appeal to partners (PTF).	Bringing the prison system into line with global human rights standards.
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VI.2. Enforced disappearances: ACAT-Burundi sounds the alarm over an alarming escalation

ACAT-Burundi has expressed its deep concern at the resurgence of enforced disappearances in Burundi. This phenomenon is characterised by arbitrary arrests, carried out without a court warrant, often followed by incommunicado detention in illegal places of deprivation of liberty.

These practices violate the fundamental guarantees enshrined in the Burundian Constitution and the Code of Criminal Procedure, as well as the regional and international protection instruments to which Burundi is a signatory.

1. A chronology of terror (July – September 2025)

Several documented cases illustrate the severity and persistence of these violations:

- **Désiré Ndayisenga:** reported missing on 27 July 2025 in Gitega, after being last seen in Bujumbura.
- **Dieudonné Niyukuri and his relatives:** on 28 August 2025, this YouTuber was abducted. Since then, they have been held incommunicado in an unknown location, with their families deprived of any information.
- **Thierry Niyomwungere:** abducted on 26 September 2025 in the Buyenzi district (Bujumbura) under circumstances similar to other documented disappearances.
- **Innocent Ntirandekura (alias Karim Ramadhan):** Taken from Gitega prison by the National Intelligence Service on 28 March 2025, he remains missing despite media appeals in July 2025. **Jean-Claude Nitegeka (aged 29):** He disappeared in July 2025; his body was eventually found dead and buried in Murirwe, confirming the worst-case scenario feared by his relatives.

These cases illustrate a recurring practice that exposes victims to torture, ill-treatment and even extrajudicial executions.

2. In light of this critical situation, ACAT-Burundi urges the Burundian authorities to:

1. **Shed full light** on the fate of the missing persons and immediately disclose their places of detention.
2. **Guarantee immediate access** for families, lawyers and doctors to all detainees.
3. **Immediately cease** the practice of enforced disappearances and unlawful detention.
4. **Bring legal proceedings** against the perpetrators of these crimes, regardless of their rank or institutional affiliation.
5. **Cooperate fully** with the human rights protection mechanisms of the AU and the UN.

ACAT-Burundi reaffirms its unwavering solidarity with the affected families and calls on the the international community to step up pressure on the Burundian authorities to put an end to these cycles of violence.

VII. OTHER ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT

VII.1 Workshop dedicated to strengthening the resilience of Burundian human rights defenders (HRDs).

On 9 December 2025, to mark the International Day of Human Rights Defenders, ACAT-Burundi organised a workshop to analyse the challenges faced by Burundian human rights defenders, reflect on strategies and provide basic training to new defenders.

During the workshop, discussions centred on the following points:

-  Definition of a human rights defender
-  The work of a human rights defender
-  The workplace of a human rights defender
-  How human rights defenders carry out their work
-  Analysis of the challenges faced by human rights defenders
-  Rethinking strategies to tackle challenges
-  Shaping the future

This workshop provided an opportunity for participants from different generations to learn from one another and share experiences.

VII.2. Exchange workshop to mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

Held on 26 June, this workshop aimed to analyse the current state of torture in Burundi in 2025. It enabled participants to identify key actors, analyse the legal mechanisms in place and reflect on and define strategic advocacy approaches. Participants reviewed the following points:

- ❖ The concept of torture,
- ❖ Torture as a phenomenon in Burundi,
- ❖ Who are the victims of torture,
- ❖ Who are the perpetrators and accomplices of acts of torture,
- ❖ Places where torture takes place,
- ❖ The current state of the fight against torture: Which actors and which strategies?
- ❖ Burundi and the implementation of its legal commitments (international, constitutional and legislative) regarding the fight against torture,
- ❖ Burundi and allegations of torture before international bodies

Participants also discussed potential advocacy avenues and partnerships to ensure justice for victims of torture.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Ten years after the 2015 crisis, the political and human rights situation remains deeply concerning.

The year 2025 was marked by an unprecedented narrowing of civic space for political opponents, journalists and human rights defenders. The exclusion of private media from parliamentary proceedings and the repeated obstruction of gatherings by political parties such as UPRONA, RANAC and CNL illustrate an environment hostile to the exercise of fundamental freedoms. Similarly, the arrests of human rights defenders and community leaders, as well as the detention and controversial conviction of Sandra Muhoza, confirm the fragility of judicial safeguards and the weakness of mechanisms for the protection of fundamental rights.

Political intolerance and the ruling party's exploitation of the Imbonerakure youth wing in human rights violations—such as cases of torture, arbitrary and illegal detentions, and abductions of opponents or those presumed to be such—exacerbate the situation in a country already weakened by poor governance across all sectors.

ACAT-Burundi deplores the fact that the Burundian authorities remain unresponsive to the cries for help raised by victims and human rights organisations in the fight against impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations. This attitude reflects not only a worrying indifference, but also a form of complicity and a failure to fulfil the state's responsibility to protect its population.

With regard to prisons, ACAT-Burundi deplores the continuing practice of arbitrary detention resulting from a failure to comply with court rulings, prison overcrowding, and violations of the fundamental rights of persons deprived of their liberty, such as access to healthcare and adequate food.

IX RECOMMENDATIONS.

It is imperative that the Burundian authorities take urgent and concrete measures to prevent human rights violations, combat impunity and ensure the effective protection of victims.

The Government of Burundi should:

- 1) Ensure the safety of the population and investigate the bodies that are regularly found in various parts of the country without the perpetrators of these murders being identified,
- 2) Guarantee respect for the law and ensure that the decisions handed down by the courts and tribunals are enforced,
- 3) Release political prisoners and prisoners of conscience who have been unjustly imprisoned.
- 4) Address cases of crimes committed by the Imbonerakure youth, which are becoming commonplace due to the impunity that plagues the judicial system; security must be ensured solely by the defence and security forces,
- 5) Cooperate with human rights protection mechanisms, in this case the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi.

To international organisations and the international community:

- 1) Continue to support initiatives to promote human rights in Burundi,
- 2) Keep a close watch on Burundi and remind the Government to honour its human rights commitments.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Examples of certain murders recorded in 2025.

Date	Identity of the victim	Location (Hill, Commune, County)	Circumstances and observations	Measures taken / Obstacles to justice
25/01/06	Pascasie	Colline Ngoma, Gashikanwa, Ngozi	Stab wounds (to the ears) following a party.	Immediate burial by administrative order despite the family's protests.
25/01/08	Man (~40 years old)	Rusiga Hill, Rugombo, Cibitoke	Body decapitated with a machete found in a field.	Buried the same day by the Imbonerakure on the orders of the administrator G. Manirakiza.
25/01/10	Georges Bigirimana	Musama Hill, Kanyosha, Bujumbura City Hall	Signs of strangulation; body discovered by neighbours after noticing a smell.	Buried without the knowledge or consent of his family.
17/01/25	Japhet Niyomukiza (aged 22)	Kibogoye Hill, Itaba, Gitega	Beaten and stabbed with a bayonet by soldiers following a cycling accident.	Died in hospital. The police investigator sent to the scene was intimidated by the soldiers.
10/02/25	Charles Karikurubu (former soldier)	Gwego Hill, Songa, Bururi	Missing for 2 weeks. Head injuries and a cut on his arm.	Buried the same day on the administration's orders without an investigation.
01/03/25	Berchmas Minani (aged 32)	Rugari area, Muyinga, Muyinga	Shot dead with a silenced pistol. History of land disputes and threats.	No investigation. Family forced to bury the victim quickly.
06/05/25	Oscar Ndayisaba	Murehe Hill, Mbuye, Muramvya	Arrested, beheaded and mutilated (organs	Buried the same day on the orders of the authorities. No investigation.

			genitals) by the Imbonerakure.	
25/05/07	Darius Nduwayo (aged 62)	Kigazi Hill, Mugwi, Cibitoke	Killed with a machete at his home during the night.	Suspicious regarding Imbonerakure patrols. No preliminary investigation.
29/07/25	Georgette Nishimwe & Jeanine Nyabenda	Nyarugari Hill, Nyaza, Burunga	Abducted by 3 Imbonerakure in the forest. Alleged rape and strangulation.	Suspects released by their leader after payment of a bribe.
23/08/25	Mathias Mpfakurera (aged 69)	Jurwe Hill, Gishubi, Gitega	Decomposing body decomposition found floating in the Ruvyironza River.	Buried on the very day he was found.
20/09/25	Teenager (~15 years old)	Mahwa Hill, Matana, Burunga	Head injuries (blows from clubs) on the RN16.	Buried the following day at the scene without identification or investigation.
25/11/09	J. Berchmas Ntahondereye	Ryasoro area, Gishubi, Gitega	Body with injuries to legs found at his employer's premises.	Police and authorities ordered an without an inquest.
14/11/25	Générose Gakecuru (aged 45)	Macu Hill, Gitega, Gitega	Mother of three children, found tied up near her home.	Buried the same day without waiting for the forensic investigations.
03/12/25	Jules Ndayikeza (aged 28)	Higiro Hill, Gitega, Gitega	Body suspended from the roof structure. Suspected suspected suicide.	Buried the same day without a prior investigation.

Appendix 2: Summary table of abductions documented by ACAT-Burundi (2025)

Date	Victim(s)	Profile / Affiliation	Location (Province)	Alleged perpetrators
14 Feb 2025	Joseph Bisharizo & Fleury Kwizera	Repatriates (former refugees in Rwanda)	Kirundo	SNR (Pépin Habimana) & Imbonerakure
20 Feb. 2025	Jean de Dieu Nduwamungu	Retired Warrant Officer (ex-FAB)	Gitega	SNR agents
19 March 2025	Ciza Chrysostome	Civilian (Ngagara area)	Bujumbura	Unidentified individuals (decoy call)
23 March 2025	Schadrac Nkunzimana	Civilian (Mukoni Hill)	Muyinga	Imbonerakure (linked to Shabani Nimubona)
24 March 2025	Emmanuel Mfitye	Former Inspector / MSD activist	Gitega	SNR (from Ndayishimiye)
2 April 2025	Fidèle Nkurembone	Shopkeeper / CNL activist	Bujumbura Rural	SNR (Athia Nduwimana)
11 August 2025	Daniel (aged 30)	Civil (Butamenwa Hill)	Gitega	National Police (following torture)
21 Sept. 2025	Audace Icoyitungiye	Retired soldier	Bujumbura	National Police (Unmarked van)
11 Nov. 2025	Ndayishimiye Juvénal	Shopkeeper (Ruyigi Market)	Ruyigi	Person in an unmarked vehicle
11 Nov. 2025	Mugisha Moise	Nurse (Rema Hospital)	Ruyigi	Individuals in an unmarked vehicle
14 Dec. 2025	Tharcisse Ndirekuramba	Teacher / CNL Manager	Gitega	SNR & Imbonerakure (Local leaders)

Appendix 3: Summary of arbitrary arrests and detentions (ACAT-Burundi, 2025)

Date	Victim(s)	Profile / Affiliation	Location (County)	Reason given / Background	Outcome
14 Jan.	F. Nijimbere & A. Mbabare	CDP officials (Opposition)	Makamba	Illegal meeting (yet authorised)	Detainees

27 Jan. to 6 Feb.	6 Doctors (Dr Nazaire, Pierre Claver, Achel,	Medical staff (Districts & Hospitals)	National (Bujumbura, Mwaro, Rutana, etc.)	Service assignment / Call-ups SNR	Released on 12/02
	Désiré, Polycarpe, Aimable)				
13 Feb.	4 Ugandans (C. John, A. Robert, B. Hillary, K. Enock)	Foreign nationals	Rumonge	No warrant (despite valid visas)	Released
26 Feb.	16 Congolese Congolese (including 6 minors)	Refugees (Musenyi Camp)	Rutana	Jogging around the camp	Transferred to the district capital
24 March	Tharcisse Nshimirimana	Teacher / CNL Manager	Mwaro	Political activist alleged	Detained
08 April	Désiré Hatungimana	CNL member	Gitega	Allegations of at night	Detained (after attempting to file a complaint)
21 April	W. Kwizera & A. Masudi	Journalists (Bonesha & Nderagakura)	Bujumbura	Coverage of a sit-in (Microfinance Ineza)	Released that same evening
13 June	F. Rutamucero, A. Bizozza, E. Nshimirimana	Civil society leaders	Bujumbura (Airport)	Participation in a Regional	Released on 16/06
15 June	Father Paul Butoyi	Priest	Burunga	Comments on the elections	Released
02 Dec.	Cyprien Sindayihebura	Plant Health Inspector	Ngozi	Refusal of entry of non-compliant products	Released after a few days

Appendix 4: Summary table of documented cases of torture and ill-treatment (2025)

Date	Victim(s)	Profile / Affiliation	Location (County)	Perpetrators alleged	Nature of the abuse / Reason
15 Jan.	Lazare Bigirimana	CNL member	Kayanza	Imbonerakure (Order of the Communal Communal Administration)	Blows with steel bars (Political)
16 Jan.	Désiré	Motorcycl e taxi driver	Gitega	Police (Gitega Police Station)	Torture (Attempted motorcycle seizure)

17 Jan.	F. Nkurunziza & J.C. Nduwayezu	UPRONA members	Bururi	Imbonerakure & Head of CNDD-FDD	Beating (Allegations of embezzlement)
7 March	Bonaventure Ndikuriyo	CNL member	Makamba	Imbonerakure & Village Chief	Barbaric torture (Forced to swallow his excrement)
15 July	Steve (aged 12)	Child (Minor)	Burunga	SNR agent (appointed in January)	Torture and unlawful detention (Trivial reason)
13 August	Ruhegwe Patrice	UPRONA member	Kirundo	Imbonerakure (Viateur Ndayisaba)	Violent assault (Political)
23 August	Gervais Hakizimana	Local candidate	Burunga	Imbonerakure & Village chief	Torture and death threats (Election)
15 Sept.	Family Théoneste Juma (5 people, including 3 minors)	UPRONA representative	Burunga	Imbonerakure (Kibimba Kibimba)	Family punitive expedition (Political defector)
01 Dec.	Franck Mpawenimana	Head of the hill	Bujumbura	Imbonerakure (led by Dany)	Trampled and beaten (Local)