

Alert No. 7

The rights of Burundian returnees from the United Republic of Tanzania must be protected by the Government of Burundi and the HCR.

Within the framework of the **UMUSEKE** program, human rights organizations, the Burundian League for Human Rights Iteka and King Umurundi Freedom continue to document the humanitarian situation of Congolese refugees and Burundian returnees from the United Republic of Tanzania.

Following our alerts and other weekly communications, our organizations express their deep concerns regarding the ongoing expulsions ordered by the Tanzanian Government, under the influence of Burundi.

Indeed, the Burundian returnees who are currently subject to expulsions from Tanzania are residing at the Nyabitare transit site, where living conditions are extremely precarious. Due to the recent decision by the Tanzanian government to carry out a forced repatriation of Burundian refugees, living conditions at this transit site are far from satisfactory. The Nyabitare site, whose capacity should not exceed 500 to 600 people, is currently overcrowded, having recorded 853 returnees on Monday, April 27, 2026. In addition, there are 634 refugees, including 618 from the Nduta camp and 16 from the Nyarugusu camp, who returned on Tuesday, April 28, 2026.

Some refugees return on foot due to persecutions suffered at the hands of the Tanzanian authorities, taking illicit routes to reach the transit site, while others are provided with trucks by the Tanzanian government up to the Burundian-Tanzanian border, before being transported by vehicles of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the transit site. Once there, the UNHCR gives them a voucher worth 80 dollars per person, intended to facilitate their return to their localities of origin. It should be noted that this approach represents a significant change from previous practice, where the UNHCR took care of their transport to their home hills. Due to delays in the distribution of transport fees by the UNHCR via Finbank, returnees are sometimes forced to wait more than a week in the transit camp, thus worsening their living conditions.

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In addition to the presence of UNHCR and the Ministry of Home Affairs responsible for repatriation, other partners are missing. It is particularly noted that there is an absence of organizations such as Caritas Burundi, responsible for the distribution of hot meals, TPO for healthcare, COPED for infrastructure, AVSI for the reintegration of people with specific needs, and the Red Cross for water supply. This absence considerably complicates the situation, depriving returnees of essential services and causing many dramatic consequences.

On Monday, April 27, 2026, a tragic event took place, in connection with the lack of health care at the transit camp: a 75-year-old woman succumbed to injuries inflicted by young Tanzanians, often referred to as "Abanamugambo", affiliated with the ruling party, the CCM. The next day, a pregnant woman also suffered from the lack of proper care during childbirth, although mother and child eventually survived. This situation stems from the Tanzanian government's hasty decision to accelerate the repatriation process without consultation with other partners, including UNHCR and the Burundian government. It should be recalled that the Tanzanian government had set the deadline of March 31, 2026, stipulating that no Burundian refugee should be on its territory after this date, granting only an additional month until April 30, 2026. And as a reminder, the president of the CNIDH, Mgr. Nyaboho Patrick, had sounded the alarm that the Burundi government would not be ready, suggesting an extension at least until July 2026.

Due to overcrowding, the repatriates do not have adequate shelter, with some being forced to spend the night under the open sky, exposed to the elements, both adults and children. Many of them show signs of violence on their bodies and fear contracting diseases resulting from deplorable hygiene conditions and overcrowding. The delay in distributing transport allowances contributes to their vulnerability and makes their existence in the transit camp extremely difficult, leaving several of them without food resources. Those who have a favorable financial situation get raw food, but have difficulties to get firewood and water. In addition to the transport voucher, UNHCR also provides return costs worth 300 dollars per person, intended to facilitate their social reintegration during the three months following their return. However, these funds are often allocated to them well after their arrival in the host communities.

The repatriates are calling for kindness from society and the Burundian government in order to ensure a dignified return to their country of origin. The Iteka League and King Umurundi Freedom, concerned about this difficult situation faced by these repatriates, make the following recommendations:

To the Burundian Government:

- Immediately deploy mobile medical teams from the Ministry of Health to the site, while waiting for the return of partners.
- Open an investigation into the violence suffered by repatriates in Tanzania, including the case of the 75-year-old woman who died.
- Document the facts with a view to referring them to regional bodies.
- Establish a confidential reporting mechanism for repatriates who are victims of violence.
- Ensure immediate access for repatriated children to schools and health centers, without requiring prior documents.

To the High Commissioner for Refugees:

- Revise the mechanism for distributing the \$80 transportation allowance: switch to cash or mobile money payment upon arrival to avoid a one-week wait.
- Publicly remind Tanzania of its obligations under the 1951 Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention on refugees.
- Deploy a mobile clinic with midwives available 24 hours a day to prevent new childbirth-related tragedies.
- Resume transportation to the original hills for vulnerable populations: pregnant women, elderly people, disabled people, unaccompanied minors.

For the UMUSEKE program

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April30, 2026

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