



LBDH/021/2026

Kampala, August 21, 2026

To His Excellency Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni,
President of the Republic of Uganda,
Kampala, Republic of Uganda

Subject: Solemn Appeal for the Protection of Burundian Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Uganda

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

The Burundian League for Human Rights "Iteka" has the honor of addressing Your Excellency with the utmost respect, but also with the gravity that the particularly worrying situation of which it has just been informed demands.

Our organization has indeed just learned of a measure that could lead to the imminent expulsion of Burundian refugees and asylum seekers currently present in Uganda. Without prejudice to any administrative or judicial proceedings that may be initiated against them, the Iteka League respectfully but firmly requests Your Excellency's intervention to ensure that no Burundian refugee or asylum seeker is forced to return to Burundi against their will until an effective individual assessment, in accordance with international protection obligations, has been carried out.

Our approach stems neither from a desire to interfere in Uganda's internal affairs, nor from a challenge to its sovereign right to regulate the entry and residence of foreigners on its territory. **It arises from an essentially humanitarian concern:** no person seeking international protection should be returned to a place where their life, liberty, or physical integrity could be seriously threatened before their individual situation has been fairly assessed.

I. Uganda: A Land of Refuge Whose Generosity Honors Africa

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

Uganda occupies a special place in the contemporary history of refugee reception in Africa and throughout the world. Over the decades, your country has welcomed populations forced into exile by the conflicts and persecution that have plagued several states in the region. Even today, Uganda remains one of the world's leading refugee-hosting countries. Data from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicates that more than two million refugees and asylum seekers were present in Uganda at the end of June 2026.

This open policy is not merely a statistical reality. It constitutes a genuine humanitarian tradition that has contributed to giving Uganda a special reputation in the Great Lakes region and around the world.



Among those who have found protection in Uganda are Burundians, Congolese, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Eritreans, Somalis and nationals of other countries facing war, persecution or instability.

For many of these people, Uganda is the last place where they can still hope to live in safety. This reality takes on a particular dimension for some Burundians today faced with a succession of door closures.

Refugees or asylum seekers having been forced to leave Tanzania, others having experienced extremely precarious situations in the Philippines, Switzerland or elsewhere, now find themselves in a situation where Uganda sometimes represents the only remaining possibility of protection in the region.

In this context, we are confident that Uganda will not want its long tradition of hospitality to be associated, even unintentionally, with a decision that could place vulnerable people in a situation of danger.

II. A Great Lakes region once again crossed by strong tensions

The situation of Burundian refugees cannot be dissociated from the broader geopolitical context of the region.

The Great Lakes region continues to face a succession of interrelated crises. The east of the Democratic Republic of Congo continues to experience an extremely worrying security situation, with massive population displacements. In February 2026, UNHCR reported that tens of thousands of people had fled violence in eastern DRC to Burundi, straining the country's humanitarian capacities. At the same time, relations between Burundi and Rwanda remain marked by tensions which have notably affected circulation and cross-border trade.

Inside Burundi, the country is gradually heading towards a new electoral sequence, with the presidential election of 2027 already looming on the horizon. In a context where political, security and institutional issues remain sensitive, any decision likely to provoke new forced population movements must be examined with particular caution.

The return of refugees cannot therefore be understood as a simple administrative question.

It must be considered in light of the actual situation in the country, the individual conditions of each refugee, the security guarantees available and the effective possibility of benefiting from protection against persecution, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and other serious human rights violations.

III. A human rights crisis that, despite institutional changes, is not entirely resolved

Excellency Mr President,

The Iteka League considers it necessary to remember that the Burundian crisis did not start with the current regime.

It finds its origins in particular in the political crisis triggered in 2015 around the third term of President Pierre Nkurunziza, a crisis which deeply marked the country and led to the exile of hundreds of thousands of Burundians.



The Iteka League documented, during this period, extrajudicial executions, targeted assassinations, forced disappearances, acts of torture, sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detentions. She also documented the human consequences of this crisis and the massive exodus of Burundian populations.

However, the change of regime that occurred in 2020 seems to have worsened all the practices denounced.

Successive reports from States, UN mechanisms and the Iteka League show the persistence of serious human rights violations under the regime of President Évariste Ndayishimiye.

Between June 2020 and June 2025, five years of President Ndayishimiye's regime, the Iteka League documented, in its report, 2,776 people killed, including 1,514 bodies recovered, 231 cases of abduction or disappearance, 313 cases of torture, and 665 cases of gender-based violence, 80% of which involved rape.

For its sixth year, and one year after the June 2025 legislative and municipal elections, the Iteka League report indicates a continuation of these crimes: 407 people killed, including 269 bodies recovered, 57 people abducted or missing, 176 victims of gender-based violence, including 119 rape victims, 44 people tortured, and 102 people arbitrarily arrested.

And the information available for the end of the first semester of 2026 shows that the situation remains worrying and is deteriorating further as the May 2027 presidential election approaches. The Iteka League's bimonthly report for May and June 2026 recorded 42 people killed, including 25 bodies recovered, 9 people abducted or missing, 21 victims of gender-based violence (GBV), including 13 rape victims, 6 people tortured, and 6 people arbitrarily arrested.

This alarming situation of human rights violations in Burundi is echoed in reports from its main partner countries, including the USA and Belgium, as well as in reports from various UN mechanisms.

While acknowledging that its reports are not exhaustive, given its operational capacities in the field, the Iteka League presents these figures as data from its documentation work and does not claim that every allegation of human rights violations has been subject to a final judicial decision establishing the criminal responsibility of the presumed perpetrators. However, the accumulation of this information over several years provides a serious indicator that should be taken into account in any assessment of the conditions for the return of people who have sought protection.

IV. Return must be voluntary, individual, and preceded by genuine guarantees

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

The Iteka League does not oppose the return of Burundian refugees who freely wish to return to their country.

On the contrary, we believe that voluntary, dignified, safe, and lasting return is one of the most desirable sustainable solutions when the conditions for such a return are actually in place.



The UNHCR itself continues to support voluntary repatriation mechanisms for Burundians, while highlighting the difficulties some returnees face regarding housing, healthcare, education, and livelihoods.

But voluntary return and forced return are two radically different realities.

Voluntary return is a decision freely made by an individual who believes they can return safely. Forced return occurs against the will of the person concerned and can, in some circumstances, constitute repression. It is precisely this distinction that we ask you to preserve.

The fact that a refugee is Burundian doesn't automatically mean that returning is safe. Likewise, the fact that a refugee left Burundi several years ago doesn't mean that the risks that caused them to leave have necessarily disappeared.

Moreover, various reports from civil society organizations report killings, kidnappings, and forced disappearances of returnees, even though the ability to document this phenomenon remains limited. This report from the FOCODE organization illustrates this situation.

V. Uganda must preserve its historical role in the search for a solution to the Burundian crisis

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

This is where your personal and historical responsibility becomes crucial. Your role in the Burundian peace process is not simply an episode in the region's diplomatic history.

The Arusha Agreement made your country and you personally a major player in the peace process. The Agreement specifically recognizes the role of the President of Uganda as facilitator of the regional peace process for Burundi and provides for his signature in that capacity.

In 2015, when Burundi was experiencing a serious political crisis, the United Nations commended Your Excellency's efforts to facilitate inter-Burundian dialogue on behalf of the East African Community.

The United Nations Security Council also reaffirmed its support for the mediation efforts led by Your Excellency and emphasized the importance of a truly inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue.

Your historical responsibility, therefore, cannot be limited to the period when negotiations were taking place around a table. It must also be expressed today, when Burundians who have fled their country are on the verge of a return they fear.

Added to this is your current responsibility as Chairperson of the East African Community.



Protecting a Burundian refugee today is also protecting the spirit of Arusha.

The spirit of Arusha is not merely a set of texts. It is based on dialogue, reconciliation, coexistence, the protection of citizens, and the pursuit of lasting peace.

VI. Expelling Burundian refugees would only displace the crisis instead of resolving it.

Expulsion to Burundi would not constitute a solution to the Burundian crisis.

It would simply risk displacing the problem. Those returned could find themselves in a situation of increased vulnerability, while those who legitimately fear for their safety could be forced to seek refuge elsewhere once again.

Such a dynamic would run counter to the regional objective of finding lasting solutions.

The Great Lakes region has already paid a considerable human price for successive forced displacements of populations. It would be regrettable if a new administrative decision were to contribute to fueling a new cycle of exile. Uganda, on the other hand, has the opportunity to demonstrate that a protection policy can be reconciled with the search for lasting solutions.

VII. We ask you to preserve the protection of Burundians present in Uganda.

In light of the above, the Iteka League respectfully requests Your Excellency:

First, to suspend all expulsion or repression measures targeting Burundian refugees or asylum seekers, particularly those whose protection claims have not yet undergone an individual, effective, and final examination.

Second, to ensure that no Burundian asylum seeker is returned to Burundi before the completion of the status determination process and the exhaustion of all available remedies.

Third, to continue guaranteeing Burundian refugees present in Uganda protection against repression, in accordance with Uganda's international and regional commitments.

Fourth, to enable Burundians who have been expelled or forced to leave other countries, particularly those from Tanzania, the Philippines, Switzerland, or other states, to apply for and benefit from a fair examination of their protection claims in Uganda, without their prior history being grounds for rejection in itself.

Fifth, to strengthen cooperation with UNHCR, regional organizations, and international partners to identify lasting solutions for refugees who cannot reasonably return to Burundi: local integration, resettlement in a third country, or other appropriate humanitarian mechanisms.

Sixth, to support the socio-economic reintegration of Burundian refugees who wish to remain in Uganda, in accordance with Ugandan law, so that they can gradually become self-reliant and contribute to their host society.



Seventh, to leverage your regional influence to promote the resumption of a truly inclusive Burundian dialogue that respects the Arusha Agreement.

VIII. An Appeal to Your Excellency in the Name of Regional Conscience

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

We know that Uganda itself faces immense responsibilities. Hosting more than two million refugees is a considerable burden for a state and for the communities that welcome them.

We also know that international solidarity must be greater for the countries that assume this responsibility. Therefore, our appeal is not to ask Uganda to bear the burden of the Burundian crisis alone.

We call upon the international community, UNHCR, the African Union, the East African Community, and Uganda's other partners to strengthen their support so that the protection of refugees does not become an unbearable burden for the host country.

But above all, we ask Your Excellency to preserve what has made Uganda a regional and international benchmark in hospitality. Sometimes, decisions go beyond their administrative scope to take on historical significance.

IX. The Final Appeal: Do Not Close the Last Door

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

Burundians have already experienced exile in neighboring and distant countries. For some, Uganda now represents one of the last remaining open doors. We therefore ask you, in the name of the principles of refugee protection and the spirit of peace that guided the Arusha process, not to close this last door.

We ask you to ensure that no Burundian is expelled to a situation where they risk persecution or serious human rights violations. We also ask you to continue making Uganda a space of protection, dialogue, and hope for Burundians and other peoples of the region.

Finally, we respectfully invite you to resume, with the moral and political authority conferred upon you by your historic role in the Arusha process, a regional initiative for a lasting solution to the Burundian crisis. For the true solution does not lie in simply moving refugees from one country to another. The real solution lies in creating conditions where no Burundian is ever again forced to flee their country to save their life.

The Iteka League remains convinced that Your Excellency, drawing on your experience as a mediator and your long-standing commitment to the Burundian peace process, will heed this call.

We therefore urge you, Your Excellency Mr. President, to consider this initiative as a call for African solidarity and a sense of historical responsibility.



LIGUE BURUNDAISE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

"ITEKA" association sans but lucratif

Agréée par l'ordonnance ministérielle n°530/0273 du 10 novembre 1994 revoyant l'ordonnance 550/029 du 6 février 1991

Membre affilié de la fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (F.I.D.H)

Awaiting a response that we hope will be favorable, we remain, Your Excellency Mr. President, with our highest regards.

For the Burundian League for Human Rights "Iteka"

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Copies sent for information to:

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- Chairperson of the African Union Commission
- Secretariat of the East African Community
- Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Relevant diplomatic missions