



STATEMENT No. 007/CDH/VICAR/2026 ON PRESSURES TOWARDS THE FORCED RETURN OF BURUNDIAN REFUGEES

The Coalition for the Defence of Human Rights of Persons Living in Refugee Camps (CDH/VICAR) expresses its deep concern over the increasing number of measures promoting or imposing the forced return of Burundian refugees, both in countries neighbouring Burundi and in other countries of asylum.

CDH/VICAR recognizes that voluntary repatriation constitutes a durable solution when it is freely chosen. However, efforts aimed at promoting or accelerating returns must under no circumstances result in Burundian refugees being forced to return to Burundi while serious risks to their safety and fundamental rights continue to be documented. Any return must remain voluntary, safe and dignified, in strict compliance with the principle of non-refoulement.

Repeated warnings

The present statement follows a series of warnings previously issued by CDH/VICAR and other organizations.

In its [Statement](#) published ahead of the Regional Conference on Comprehensive Solutions for Burundian Refugees, the Coalition recalled that any return must be strictly voluntary, safe and dignified, without direct or indirect pressure. It also reported that some refugees who had returned from Tanzania to Burundi subsequently fled into exile again.

On 23 April 2026, [CDH/VICAR](#), together with Burundian and international human rights organizations, also denounced violence, intimidation, restrictions on access to humanitarian assistance and other coercive measures reported in the context of the closure of Nduta refugee camp and forced returns to Burundi.

These repeated warnings demonstrate that the concerns expressed today are part of the Coalition's continued monitoring of the situation.

Refugees who still fear returning to Burundi

These concerns have also been expressed by UNHCR. In an [article](#) published by UN News on 25 February 2026, the agency indicated that up to 17,000 Burundian refugees in Tanzania said they were unable to return to Burundi, particularly because of fears for their safety or the risk of political persecution. UNHCR also reported coercive measures, including the demolition of shelters and reports of ill-treatment.

These refugees have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries, with many currently seeking international protection in Uganda and Kenya. However, they are struggling to obtain such protection and are instead being called upon to return to Burundi, even though they state that they fear for their safety. They therefore face repeated displacement without being able to secure durable protection.

The situation in Burundi must continue to be considered

Recent information concerning the human rights situation in Burundi justifies maintaining a rigorous individual assessment of risks before any decision to return a person is taken.

In its [report](#) covering the period from July 2020 to June 2026, Ligue Iteka states that it documented 7,967 allegations of human rights violations, including 3,157 people killed, 283 people abducted and reported missing, 348 cases of torture, 830 victims of gender-based violence and 3,349 arbitrary arrests. Ligue Iteka specifies that these figures correspond to cases it documented and constitute neither an exhaustive account of all violations committed in Burundi nor judicial findings.

Ligue Iteka also notes that some people who returned to Burundi subsequently fled into exile again, sometimes only a few days after their return. This situation raises serious concerns regarding the sustainability of some returns.

For its part, FOCODE, in its March 2025 report entitled [Un laissez-passer de retour qui ne passe pas](#), focusing on reprisals and violence against Burundians who returned from exile, documents 17 cases: 11 enforced disappearances, three prolonged arbitrary detentions without trial, two detentions followed by release under pressure, and one extrajudicial execution.

These documented cases show that returning to Burundi may still expose some refugees to serious human rights violations. In this context, it would be particularly concerning to assume generally that Burundian refugees no longer need international protection or to compel them to return without a rigorous and individualized assessment of the risks they may face.

Refugees fleeing pressure in a first country of asylum, as well as those who flee into exile again after returning to Burundi, must therefore be able to access asylum procedures and have their protection needs individually assessed.

Concerns extending beyond neighbouring countries

CDH/VICAR's concerns are not limited to countries neighbouring Burundi.

In Switzerland, forced removals of rejected Burundian asylum seekers have also been documented. According to the AIDA [report](#) on Switzerland, several Burundian nationals have been returned to Burundi since November 2025. On 21 April 2026, another group of Burundian nationals whose asylum applications had been rejected was also returned to Bujumbura on a special flight.

In response to this situation, the Swiss Refugee Council ([SRC/OSAR](#)) called for the suspension of forced returns to Burundi. Similarly, ACAT-Switzerland, ACAT-Burundi and FIACAT, [in a joint statement of 28 April 2026](#), called for the immediate suspension of these returns, considering that they exposed those concerned to serious risks of human rights violations and raised serious concerns regarding compliance with the principle of non-refoulement.

Beyond Switzerland, Burundian nationals in other countries may also have their asylum applications rejected and face measures aimed at returning them to Burundi. CDH/VICAR recalls that any decision on return must be preceded by a rigorous individual assessment of the risks involved and must strictly respect the principle of non-refoulement.

In light of the above, CDH/VICAR calls on:

- All States hosting Burundian refugees and asylum seekers, both in countries neighbouring Burundi and elsewhere in the world, to ensure that any return to Burundi fully complies with international law, particularly the principle of non-refoulement.
- The Governments of Uganda and Kenya, in particular, to grant international protection to Burundian asylum seekers, especially those who fled Tanzania to escape pressure or forced

repatriation to Burundi, those who fled into exile again after having been forcibly returned to Burundi, as well as those whose asylum applications were already being processed.

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) not to support any measure leading to forced repatriation, as all returns must remain voluntary, safe and dignified, and instead to strengthen its advocacy with the Governments of Uganda and Kenya to ensure access to international protection for Burundians who fled Tanzania, as well as those who fled into exile again after returning to Burundi.
- International and regional human rights organizations, civil society organizations and international partners to strengthen monitoring of the situation of these refugees, document cases of denial of access to asylum, pressure to return or refoulement, and support mechanisms enabling people at risk to access effective and durable protection.

Done on 6 October 2026

For CDH/VICAR

SHARANGABO Léopold

