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PRESS RELEASE

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN BURUNDI:
THE UN CONFIRMS CONCERNS OF OMCT AND ACAT Burundi**

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On 1st February 2008, as its 40th session came to an end, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted its concluding observations, having examined the combined second, third and fourth periodic report of Burundi regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

In early January 2008, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) submitted a shadow report to CEDAW in collaboration with the Burundian Christians' Association for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT) to be considered alongside the State report. CEDAW received this alternative report warmly and adopted many of its observations and recommendations.

This OMCT/ACAT report denounces serious violations of women's rights in Burundi. It emphasises that women are consistently victims of different forms of violence and that the end of the armed conflict has not changed this situation. The perpetrators of these crimes enjoy impunity before all state authorities. The report proposes a series of measures to fight this impunity and bring to an end the strong discrimination against women that is institutionalised in both Burundian laws and customs.

As the report from OMCT and ACAT underlines, gender-based violence is mostly sexual in nature. The Committee "*urges the State party to adopt a comprehensive strategy to combat all forms of violence against women*" and to that effect "*make use of general recommendation 19*". It calls on the State to "*train the judiciary, law enforcement officials, legal professionals, social workers and health providers*" to ensure that crimes against women are prosecuted and perpetrators sanctioned and to provide appropriate support to victims. Moreover, the Committee emphasises that a law on domestic violence must be passed.

The Committee echoes the joint report of OMCT and ACAT in urging the State party “to ensure that women in detention are systematically separated from men and supervised by gender-sensitive prison staff “. The State is also called on to undertake studies on trafficking of women and “to strengthen measures to combat and prevent trafficking in women and girls”. Furthermore, the Committee calls for an amendment of the new draft Penal code with regard to the criminalisation of prostitution.

The Committee further echoes OMCT and ACAT’s concern regarding a number of legislative provisions that are discriminatory toward women and prevent them from enjoying their fundamental rights. The Committee calls on the Government “to ensure the effective implementation of laws and policies that provide for de jure equality and seek to eliminate discrimination against women” especially pointing at provisions of the family code, the nationality code, the criminal code and certain labour regulations concerning pregnant women in particular.

The Committee also expresses concern about “the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of men and women”. It urges the State to take measures to eliminate such cultural practices and stereotypes with the cooperation of civil society organizations, women’s groups, community leaders, teachers and the media. It also calls on the State party “to implement training programmes on the Convention for prosecutors, judges, and lawyers so as to establish a culture supportive of gender equality” and “to remove the impediments that women may face in gaining access to justice”.

Reiterating concerns expressed by OMCT and ACAT on the lack of national policies to promote gender equality, the Committee welcomes the adoption of the National Gender Policy and recommends that the State put in place the planned mechanisms without delay.

OMCT and ACAT Burundi greatly appreciate the concluding observations and recommendations of the Committee and call on the Burundian Government, and especially the people’s elected representatives at the local and national level, to fully implement the recommendations without delay so that they comply with Burundi’s international obligations.

For further information:

- Shadow report on violence against women in Burundi:
http://www.omct.org/pdf/VAW/2008/CEDAW40th_Rep_alt_Burundi_fr.pdf
http://www.omct.org/pdf/VAW/2008/CEDAW40th_Rep_alt_Burundi_eng_summary.pdf
- Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on Burundi, 40th session, 1st February 2008:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/co/CEDAW.C.BDI.CO.4.pdf>
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm>
- Recommendation no19 of the CEDAW:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom19>

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