



Burundi

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Burundi is a small country in Africa's Great Lakes Region striving to overcome the legacy of over a decade of civil war. A new government of national unity led by President Pierre Nkurunziza has since 2005, embarked on the process of rebuilding virtually all of the country's institutions, strengthening the rule of law and improving the quality of life for its people. But despite some early signs of progress, formidable challenges remain.

Burundi remains one of the world's poorest countries. 68% of its 9 million people are living in poverty according to the International Monetary Fund. Profound institutional weaknesses, lack of trained personnel and resources are hampering the effective implementation of new laws and access to justice for millions of people. Of approximately 8,000 prisoners nationwide, 62% are pretrial detainees who are unable to afford legal representation. Without a juvenile justice system, over 400 child detainees are held in the same communal cells as convicted adult criminals and often vulnerable to abuse.



Prison life in Burundi



Woman detainee with child

IBJ's Involvement

In November 2006 IBJ deployed a mission tasked with conducting a preliminary legal needs assessment and initiating relationships with local partners. Since then we have signed an MOU with the Bar Association of Burundi, 'l'Ordre des Avocats du Burundi' and established a strong partnership with the Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (APRODH). Together with APRODH and the Bar Association, IBJ has produced 10,000 'Know Your Rights' posters that are being distributed in prisons, police stations, local government offices and other public centers. The purpose of the poster campaign is to educate ordinary citizens, detainees and law enforcement agents on the right of accused persons to freedom from torture, right to legal counsel and right to a fair trial.

During the assessment visit, IBJ visited Mpimba Central Prison in Bujumbura and met with government officials in charge of prisons and agreed that there is a huge gap in the area of strengthening the criminal justice in Burundi especially in the aftermath of the civil war. To further that goal, IBJ held the first of many trainings bringing together 20 legal aid lawyers, 12 prosecutors and magistrates, 4 police officers, and 29 civil society members (a link to full coverage of the training is placed above).

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