

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment please email [Basededonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca](mailto:Basededonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca).

22 February 2013

### BDI104286.FE

Burundi: Movement for Solidarity and Democracy (MSD), including its structure and membership card; participation at the meeting organized by the Frodebu party on 18 November 2012; treatment of the party and its members by the authorities (2010-January 2013)

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#### 1. General Information

According to the *Political Handbook of the World (PHW)*, the Movement of Solidarity and Democracy (Mouvement pour la solidarité et la démocratie, MSD) is a political party founded in December 2007 (*PHW* 2012, 213). Sources indicated, however, that the government refused to allow the MSD to register as an official political party (*ibid.*) until June 2009 (UN 31 Aug. 2009, para. 13). According to a report on Burundi prepared by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the reasons for the refusal was that the party's first name, the Movement for Security and Democracy (Mouvement pour la sécurité et la démocratie), [UN English version] "usurped the function of ensuring security, which was the sole prerogative of the State" (*ibid.*).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a Burundian professor teaching philosophy at the University of Sudbury, who observes the political situation in Burundi and writes about the subject, stated that the MSD is a [translation] "splinter group" whose members are "few" and "not very visible" (Professor of philosophy 28 Jan. 2013). Also, a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Florida who writes about Central Africa and Burundi stated in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate that the MSD is little known (Professor Emeritus 29 Jan. 2013).

However, also in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an independent consultant in Burundi, who has been working with NGOs and international organizations for more than 25 years and who writes about the political situation in the country, stated that the party in power considers the MSD [translation] "a threat," and that the party is "is the government's second target, after the FNL [National Liberation Forces]" (28 Jan. 2013). According to the *PHW*, the FNL participated in armed rebellions against various governments in Burundi and was registered as a political part in 2009 (*PHW* 2012, 213).

The Professor of philosophy stated that, although members of the MSD are not [translation] "afraid" of the regime in place, the contrary is true for the leader of the MSD, Alexis Sinduhije (28 Jan. 2013). According to *PHW*, Alexis Sinduhije is also the founder of the MSD (*PHW* 2012, 213). Alexis Sinduhije lives in exile (Professor Emeritus 29 Jan. 2013; Professor of philosophy 28 Jan. 2013; independent consultant 28 Jan. 2013).

According to the independent consultant, the MSD is seen as a possible source for revolt against the government in place in Burundi (28 Jan. 2013). A report from a group of UN experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) published in December 2011 about the role of foreign groups in the DRC indicates that Alexis Sinduhije [UN English version] "is a particularly active supporter of FNL combatants and armed rebellion in Burundi," and that

FNL combatants told the Group that Sinduhije had been tasked with convincing regional and international Governments that the Burundian Government's abuses and corruption justified an armed rebellion. (UN 2 Dec. 2011, para. 138)

#### 2. 2010 Elections

According to the *PHW*, the MSD won 3.84 percent of the votes in the 2010 municipal elections, taking fifth place (*PHW* 2012, 213). However, the MSD and several other opposition parties withdrew from the electoral process following the elections (Professor Emeritus 29 Jan. 2013; Afrique-express.com n.d.). Those parties claimed the municipal elections were fraudulent (Professor of philosophy 28 Jan. 2013; Professor Emeritus 29 Jan. 2013). However, sources indicated that international observers noted no evidence of fraud (*ibid.*; Professor of philosophy 28 Jan. 2013). According to the

Professor Emeritus, those parties refused to participate in the legislative and presidential elections that took place later in 2010 (29 Jan. 2013).

The MDC is a member of the Democratic Alliance for Change (Alliance démocratique pour le changement, ADC) (Professor Emeritus 29 Jan. 2013; Afrique-express.com n.d.). The ADC is a coalition formed by the political opposition parties that withdrew from the electoral process in 2010 (ibid.; Professor Emeritus 29 Jan. 2013). The ADC is also known as the Democratic Alliance for Change (Alliance des démocrates pour le changement) (PHW 2012, 212) or the ADC-Ikibiri (Afrique-express.com n.d.). The ADC is headed by the president of the Front for Democracy in Burundi (Front pour la démocratie au Burundi, Frodebu) (ibid.), the party that gave rise to the creation of the Alliance (PHW 2012, 212.)

### 3. Structure of the MSD

Information on the MSD's structure was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

According to an article published on the website of the Civil Society Coalition for Electoral Monitoring (Coalition de la société civile pour le monitoring électoral, COSOME), a Burundi NGO, the party held preliminary internal elections in March 2010 to determine its presidential candidate (COSOME 17 Mar. 2010). Those elections were held at the national level (ibid.). The article stated that, according to the president of the commission charged with organizing the elections for the MSD, 912,415 people participated in the national consultations, but the article also noted that that number corresponds to approximately one third of all eligible voters in Burundi (ibid.).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an investigator with the Great Lakes Region Human Rights League (Ligue des droits de la personne dans la région des Grands Lacs) stated that it [translation] "is difficult to identify the number of MSD members because there are sympathizers who support the party in secret out of fear of being mistreated by the government" (LDGL 21 Feb. 2013). The investigator also stated that the MSD office is located in the Kinanira district, near the Bujumbura international school in the southern part of the capital (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

A news summary published by the Association for Reflection and Information on Burundi (Association de réflexion et d'information sur le Burundi, ARIB) cites Radio sans frontières Bonesha as indicating that there is a youth chapter of the MSD (ARIB 23 Nov. 2012). According to the summary, the youth chapter criticized the actions of police against members of the ADC in a release signed by Donatien Kwizera (ibid.). Further information on the youth chapter could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

### 4. Membership Cards

An article published on the COSOME website indicates that, in the internal primary elections held by the party, some party militants were in possession of membership cards, but those who were not had also been able to vote (17 Mar. 2010).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the LDGL investigator stated that, according to an active MSD member he had consulted, [translation] "the party had issued membership cards before the 2010 elections. The cards bear the party's emblem of a hand-held torch in a rectangle of three colours: orange, blue and white" (LDGL 13 Feb 2013). The investigator added: [translation] "According to the same source, other cards have just been issued this year, in 2013. The distinctive feature of those cards is that there is an area reserved for a contributions schedule" (ibid.).

In follow-up correspondence, the LDGL investigator noted that to obtain a membership card, a person must be considered a [translation] "strong and competent activist" and must be on the membership list (LDGL 21 Feb. 2013). The investigator added that the card costs 500 Burundian francs (approximately \$0.32 US) for people living in rural areas, and 1,000 Burundian francs (approximately 0.63 \$ US) for those living in urban areas (ibid.).

Further information on MSD membership cards and information corroborating that provided by the LDGL investigator could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

### 5. Meeting Organized by the Frodebu

Sources indicated that in November 2012, the police prevented a political meeting organized by the Frodebu from taking place in the city of Gatumba, west of Bujumbura (RFI 19 Nov. 2012; COSOME 19 Nov. 2012). According to Radio France internationale (RFI), the Frodebu had invited other members of the ADC to the meeting but they were blocked from travelling to the location by approximately 100 policemen (RFI 19 Nov. 2012). Sources indicated that as many as 10 people were injured in altercations with the police (ibid.; COSOME 19 Nov. 2012). Police reportedly used tear gas (ibid.; RFI 19 Nov. 2012). RFI also indicated that the police used batons, billy clubs and water canons (ibid.).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a researcher working at the Research Institute for Development (Institut de recherche pour le développement] in France and who writes about the political situation in Burundi stated that it is [translation] "very likely" that members of the MSD take part in ADC meetings (5 Feb. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints for this Response.

### 6. Treatment of MSD Members by the Authorities

According to the independent consultant, MSD members are [translation] "targeted" by the regime and may be intimidated, imprisoned and, "in extreme cases, they may even be killed" (independent consultant 28 Jan. 2013). He

added that, in particular, the association of youths with the ruling party [translation] "operates as a sort of paramilitary militia" on behalf of the regime (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints for this Response.

According with the *PHW*, the spokesperson for the MSD, François Nyamoya, was arrested in September 2010 for having criticized the army, and he was imprisoned until October 2010 (*PHW* 2012, 213). The *PHW* indicated that the arrest prompted Alexis Sinduhije to leave Burundi (ibid.). However, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported, rather, that he fled the country because of the violence that ensued after the 2010 elections were contested (AFP 17 Jan. 2012).

According to the Professor Emeritus, after Alexis Sinduhije went into exile, the police searched his home and found military uniforms (29 Jan. 2013). The researcher stated that the MSD offices had been searched and that the police had also found weapons (5 Feb. 2013). According to the Professor Emeritus, those items may have been planted in order to suggest that a revolt was being planned (29 Jan. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints for this Response.

Human Rights Watch reported that the decapitated body of an MSD member was found in the city of Giheta in November 2011 (Human Rights Watch May 2012, 39). Men in police uniforms driving what appeared to be a police vehicle went to look for him at his home the previous day without giving any explanations (ibid.). The family of the deceased was not able to claim the victim's body despite actions taken with the local and provincial authorities (ibid.).

Sources indicated that in January 2012, Alexis Sinduhije was arrested by police while he was in Tanzania (RFI 25 Jan. 2012; AFP 17 Jan. 2012). Some sources reported he was arrested on the request of the government of Burundi (ibid.; Professor of philosophy 28 Jan. 2013). However, he was released and returned to Europe (ibid.; RFI 25 Jan. 2012).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Publication:** *Political Parties of the World 2009*

**Oral sources:** professor emeritus at the Université catholique de Louvain, a professor of sociology and demography at the Université du Burundi, and a post-doctoral intern at the University of Antwerp were not able to provide any information for this Response. Attempts to contact the head of an NGO working to decrease violence and promote reconciliation in Burundi and a representative of the Ligue burundaise des droits de l'homme Itaka were unsuccessful.

**Internet sites, including:** Agence de Presse Africaine; AllAfrica; Amnesty International; *Burundi Bwacu*; *Burundi Réalités*; Commission électorale nationale indépendante; eoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; International Crisis Group; *Iwacu*; United Nations – Refworld, Integrated Regional Information Networks; Radio Isanganiro; Radio sans frontières Bonasha; Radio Télévision nationale du Burundi.

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