Special Rapporteur to give public lecture in Burundi during unofficial visit

BUJUMBURA, Burundi (July 21, 2014) –UN Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai will give a public lecture in Bujumbura, Burundi, tomorrow as part of a brief academic visit to the country ahead of key elections planned for 2015.

The lecture will take place at 2 p.m. on July 22 at the Best Outlook Hotel. The subject of the lecture is "the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in the context of elections."

Kiai, who is the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, is concerned about reports of growing restrictions on assembly and association rights in Burundi, particularly with elections approaching. Kiai has so far met with a range of stakeholders from both civil society and the government.

Kiai has turned the issue of assembly and association rights during election periods one of his signature issues during his time as Special Rapporteur – even making it the focus of his most recent report to the UN General Assembly.

"The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are especially critical in the lead-up to elections," Kiai said. "Democracy is not simply the act of casting a vote. It's a year-round job. An election cannot be free if the people are not free to express their will through peaceful assemblies and associations every single day."

The United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ivan Simonovic, visited Burundi in June and called on the authorities of Burundi to ensure that human rights are fully protected ahead of next year's presidential elections.

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