



## ***Committee on International Justice and Peace***

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April 20, 2015

Most Reverend Banshimiyubusa Gervais  
President of the Burundi Catholic Bishops' Conference  
B.P. 1390  
Bujumbura, Republic of Burundi

Dear Bishop Banshimiyubusa:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to express support and solidarity as you continue to work tirelessly to preserve peace and national unity in the face of questions concerning the interpretation of the national constitution. Your Conference's message in March of this year expressed a courageous and forthright position: "The president elected by the people of Burundi must not exceed the two terms of five years stated in the constitution."

As you are aware, the people of Burundi are not alone in confronting the problem of preserving and protecting the democratic principles enshrined in national constitutions. Africa has seen too many examples of political leaders revising the constitution in order to remain in power for indeterminate lengths of time. In many cases, political leaders are able to stay in power for decades, reducing the quality of healthy debate and the political competition of ideas and policies, and repressing private media and civil society. Africa has also seen the Catholic Church intervene to urge leaders to forgo constitutional changes in order to stay in power in countries such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is our hope that your courageous action will also bear positive fruits for the promotion of democracy, peace and social cohesion.

We have taken the opportunity to send your Conference's statement to the National Security Council, State Department and the United States Mission to the United Nations. We have asked our government officials to take your positions and thoughts into consideration as they formulate United States policy in Burundi and to look for opportunities to consult or work with you, where appropriate to your mission, to promote an open and productive democracy in Burundi.

Let me end by reiterating our support for, and solidarity with, the Church and people of Burundi. I welcome your reflections on how we can work together to promote sustainable peace and prosperity in Burundi.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú  
Bishop of Las Cruces  
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace