

Bujumbura, Burundi, October 3 (Infosplusgabon) - Burundi's suspension of almost all international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the country is a deeply "repressive measure" that will severely impact some of the most vulnerable people in the country, human rights group, Amnesty International, has said as the suspension announced last week came into effect.

Burundi's Minister of Interior on Tuesday confirmed in a meeting with NGO representatives that only organizations running hospitals and schools would be exempt from the suspension, according to a statement by the human rights watchdog.

"The suspension of almost all international NGOs in Burundi is a sweeping and arbitrary decision that will cause unnecessary suffering among the population that relies on the vital services these organizations and their local partner NGOs provide," said Sarah Jackson, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes.

"The measures announced are vague and amount to heavy-handed state interference into the internal affairs of non-governmental organizations. This repressive measure follows increasing restrictions on civil society space and should be reversed immediately."

Amnesty International noted that Burundi's National Security Council announced the

three-month suspension on 27 September following a new law governing foreign NGOs that came into force in January 2017.

At Tuesday's meeting, Burundi's Minister of the Interior said international NGOs had up to three months to present four documents or be deregistered altogether.

The four documents are a cooperation agreement signed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; a memorandum on the implementation of the law on foreign NGOs and the national development plan; an agreement with the Ministry of Finance that they will respect banking regulations; and a plan to progressively eliminate ethnic inequalities in the staffing of their organizations within three years.

Meanwhile, all NGOs working in the health sector have been ordered to present their partnership agreements to the Ministry of Health and attend a meeting on 15 October or be deregistered.

Amnesty International said the directive and the way it has been communicated has caused much confusion and uncertainty.

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