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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the forced removals of civilians in Burundi**

The European Union strongly deplores the renewed outbreak of violence and internal conflict over the past few weeks in Burundi, mainly in the southern part of the country and around the capital, Bujumbura.

The European Union is disturbed by the renewed rebel attacks the first victim of which has been the civilian population.

It is also particularly concerned about the recent forced removals by the Burundi army of some 260 000 civilians in the countryside round Bujumbura.

The European Union deplores the violation of human rights, the loss of human life and the destruction of property which have been the hallmark of this operation. It regrets the anguish and suffering to which the civilian population was subjected during their forced transfer to the assembly areas.

The European Union calls upon the Burundi Government to call a halt to the policy of forced removals and to allow the people to return to their property as quickly as possible. In the meantime it urges that Government to provide the people with improved sanitary and temporary accommodation conditions.

It notes that the Burundi Government has assured United Nations representatives and international non-governmental organisations free access to all of the camps concerned to enable them to provide humanitarian assistance. It asks the Burundi authorities to continue to afford the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Burundi and its observers the same access.

The European Union hopes that all Burundi rebel movements will join the Arusha peace process and that all the parties in the Burundi conflict will choose the path of negotiation rather than that of violence and conflict.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, and the EFTA countries, members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.