

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 16/002/2008

16 May 2008

UA 131/08 Arbitrary arrest/fear of torture and other ill-treatment

BURUNDI Scores of civilians, including **Coyitungiye Audace (m), Ndikumana Joseph (m), Nduwabike Jérôme (m), Kayobera (m), Minani Léonidas (m), Ntahompagaze Tharcisse (m), Nyabenda Léonidas (m), Miburo Jean De Dieu (m), Bizimana Issa, (m), Mvuyekure Sébatien (m), Bimenyimana Patrice (m), Mbonigaba Révérien (m), Irishura Jérémie (m), Mbarushimana Gabriel (m), Karerwa Damien (m)**

Scores of civilians suspected of supporting an armed opposition group have been arrested by police since the start of April, and are at grave risk of torture.

The detainees are accused of supporting the last armed opposition group still operating in the country, the National Liberation Forces (*Forces Nationales de Libération*, FNL), which resumed hostilities with government forces on 17 April. Many have been held without charge in excess of the legal maximum of 15 days.

The majority of detainees have been arrested in the western provinces of Bujumbura Mairie, Bujumbura Rural, Bubanza and Kayanza; others in the northern province of Ngozi and the south-western provinces of Makamba and Bururi. Many are being detained in small police detention facilities (*cachots*), which are severely overcrowded.

Seventeen detainees (15 of them named above) are being held in a cell measuring two metres square in a *cachot* in Ngozi. According to local human rights monitors, they are being denied family visits: this means they are going hungry, as detention centres provide no food to inmates. Police officers are apparently feeding their leftovers to the detainees. There is no latrine in the cell.

Local sources have stated that a number of those detained have been transferred to a camp run by the division of the army in charge of controlling the waters of Lake Tanganyika, called Camp Marine. The camp is in the commune of Kabezi, in the province of Bujumbura Rural, south of the capital, Bujumbura.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

An estimated 300,000 people were killed in the armed conflict in Burundi that began in 1993. The FNL continued hostilities until 7 September 2006, when they signed a "Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement" with the government. A committee overseeing peace negotiations, the Joint Verification Monitoring Mechanism, began work on 19 February 2007. The FNL delegation pulled out of talks in July 2007, but returned on 16 May 2008.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the recent arbitrary arrest of scores of civilians suspected of supporting the National Liberation Forces, and urging the authorities to release them unless they are to be charged with recognizably criminal offences;
- calling on the authorities to bring the detainees to trial promptly, before an independent and impartial court in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness;

- urging the authorities to ensure that all detainees are protected from torture or other ill-treatment, in accordance with international human rights law;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that all detainees have access to medical care and sanitary facilities;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all detainees have access to lawyers of their own choosing and family visits.

APPEALS TO:Minister of Justice

Monsieur Jean Bosco Ndikumana
Ministère de la Justice
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Bujumbura, République du Burundi
Fax: +257 22 21 86 10
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

Minister of Public Security

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Ministère de la Sécurité Publique
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Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

Defence Minister

Germain Niyoyankana
Ministère de la Défense
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Fax: +257 22 22 39 59
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Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

Director General of the National Police

Fabien Ndayishimiye
Direction Générale de la Police Nationale
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Fax: +257 22 23 91 83
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Burundi accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 27 June 2008.