

PUBLIC

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UA 318/08 Arbitrary arrest/ prisoner of conscience

BURUNDI Alexis Sinduhije (m)

Alexis Sinduhije, the President of the Movement for Security and Democracy (Mouvement pour la Sécurité et la Démocratie, MSD), a political opposition group, was arrested on 3 November during a MSD party meeting. Thirty-six others were also arrested, but have since been released. Alexis Sinduhije is currently detained in Mpimba Central Prison in the capital, Bujumbura. He is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for expressing his political views.

The ruling party, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy, (Conseil national de défense et de la démocratie-Forces de défense et de la démocratie - CNDD-FDD), has recently denied opposition parties the right to peaceful assembly by preventing them from holding meetings without government authorization. Human rights monitors initially thought the arrests were made because the meeting had been held without authorization. The MSD had also had problems registering as a political party.

On 11 November, Alexis Sinduhije was brought before the deputy prosecutor at the Prosecutor's office in Bujumbura. He was subsequently charged for showing "contempt for the Head of State" ("outrage au chef de l'état"). The charges were based on documents seized during the arrests which were apparently critical of the President's development policies. His file should go before the advisory chamber (chambre de conseil) within several days when the acting Judge will decide whether or not to grant him provisional release.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The arrest of Alexis Sinduhije has raised considerable concern amongst members of civil society and the international community about the protection of civil and political rights in Burundi. The United States, the European Union and the UK strongly condemned Alexis Sinduhije's arrest. The CNDD-FDD has shown increasing intolerance towards political opponents, journalists and human rights defenders perceived as being critical towards them.

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

- expressing grave concern that Alexis Sinduhije has been detained on a charge of "contempt for the Head of State", simply for being critical of the President's development policies;
- urging the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- reminding the authorities that Burundi is a state party to both the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee the right to freedom of expression.

APPEALS TO:

President

Pierre Nkurunziza

Président de la République

Présidence de la République

Boulevard de l'Uprona

Rohero I
BP 1870
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: +257 22 22 74 90
Salutation: Monsieur le Président/Excellence

Minister of Justice and Keeper of Seals
Monsieur Jean-Bosco Ndikumana
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux
BP 1880
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: +257 22 21 86 10
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

First Vice-president
Monsieur Yves Sahinguvu
Premier Vice-président
Présidence de la République
BP 1870
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: +257 22 22 74 90
Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Vice-président/Excellence

The Prosecutor of the Republic
Monsieur Elyse Ndaye
Procureur Générale de la République
Parquet Général
BP 105
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax : +257 22 25 88 44
Salutation: Monsieur le Procureur / Dear Procureur

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 31 December 2008.