

UA 05/98

Torture

7 January 1998

BURUNDI Astère Baranyigera, 36 years old, teacher

Amnesty International fears for the physical integrity of Astère Baranyigera, who is being held at the *Brigade spéciale de recherche* (BSR), Special Investigation Brigade, in the capital, Bujumbura. He was reportedly subjected to beatings at the time of his arrest on 31 December 1997 and tortured in custody. There is concern that he may still be tortured in custody.

Astère Baranyigera, a teacher at Mugeru Minor Seminary in Gitega province, was on his way to regularise payment of his salary when he was arrested by soldiers and taken to a cell at SOGEMAC market in Bujumbura. He was severely beaten by the soldiers. He was subsequently transferred to the BSR, where he is still being held. He is not known to have been charged with any offence.

In 1993, Astère Baranyigera was an active member of the *Front pour la démocratie au Burundi* (FRODEBU), Front for Democracy in Burundi, whose leader, former President Melchior Ndadaye was killed by government soldiers in October 1993. He was also Ndadaye's official photographer. In 1996, he fled into exile in the Democratic Republic of Congo, from where he recently returned to Burundi. He was subsequently employed as a teacher at Mugeru Minor Seminary.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Burundi has been in a state of civil war since the coup attempt of 21 October 1993. Since then, more than 150,000 people have been killed by security forces or armed groups from both Tutsi and Hutu communities. Since the coup in July 1996, which returned Major Pierre Buyoya to power, the conflict has continued and human rights violations by the government security forces and by Tutsi and Hutu armed groups have continued. Due to an increase in attacks by Hutu-led groups in 1996, some members of the government called for the "surveillance and denunciation of enemies", these being understood to be mainly Hutu. Many young Hutu are regularly arrested or killed by the Tutsi-dominated army on the grounds that they are "assailants", or are "helping the enemy". Such accusations often lead to arbitrary arrests.

Although Major Pierre Buyoya promised to end human rights violations when he came to power, Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of extrajudicial execution, arbitrary arrest and torture. Critics and opponents of the government have been harassed, detained or held under house arrest. More than 6,500 civilians, mostly Hutu, including at least 2,600 accused of involvement in massacres in Burundi, are held in various prisons and detention centres around the country. The majority are held without charge. Torture is reported to be carried out systematically, and with impunity, in detention centres belonging to the security forces. Deaths in custody are often reported.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Burundi authorities to investigate human rights violations, including extrajudicial execution, "disappearance", torture and ill-treatment and arbitrary arrest, committed by members of the Burundi security forces who continue to act with complete impunity.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes in French, Kiswahili or your own language:

- expressing concern at reports that Astère Baranyigera has been subjected to beatings and torture at the time of his arrest and while in custody;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety and humane treatment of Astère Baranyigera, and to allow him immediate access to his family, legal counsel, medical care and representatives of humanitarian organizations;
- seeking clarification of the reasons for his arrest and continued detention; calling on the authorities to release him unless he has been charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- urging that the allegations of ill-treatment be immediately investigated and those responsible be brought to justice in accordance with international standards for fair trial;

NOTE: no mail is getting through to Burundi at present.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Terence SINUNGURUZA

Ministre de la Justice et Garde des sceaux

Fax: 257 22 2148

Telegrams: Ministre Rubashamiheto, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

Minister of Interior

Lieutenant-Colonel Epitace BAYAKANAKANDI

Ministre de l'Intérieur

Fax : + 257 222148 / 213055

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Intérieur, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

Procurator General

Monsieur Jean-Bosco BUTASI

Procureur Général

Fax: 257 222148

Monsieur le Procureur Général

COPIES TO:

President

Major Pierre BUYOYA

Président de la République

Fax: 257 22 7490

Minister for Human Rights

Madame Christine RUHAZA

Ministre des Droits de la Personne

Fax: + 257 216102

and 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 18 February 1998.