

EXTRA 164/96

Fear for safety

25 October 1996

**BURUNDIANastase UWIZERA, deacon of the Roman Catholic church**

Amnesty International has just learned that Anastase Uwizera has not been seen since 24 September 1996 when he was reportedly abducted by members of the *Forces pour la défense de la démocratie* (FDD), Forces for the Defence of Democracy, the armed wing of the *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD), National Council for the Defence of Democracy (see below). Anastase Uwizera, a deacon of the Roman Catholic church and a member of the majority Hutu ethnic group, was reportedly accused by the FDD of collaborating with government soldiers based in Rutegama parish. Amnesty International fears that he may be tortured or killed.

Amnesty International opposes hostage-taking, detention of prisoners of conscience, torture, killings of prisoners and other deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed political groups. The organization's mandate in relation to armed political groups, such as the FDD, has been defined on the basis of international humanitarian law. International humanitarian law does not prohibit the taking of civilian prisoners in war or armed conflict and Amnesty International does not therefore make general calls for the release of all non-combatants captured by armed political groups in a situation of war or internal conflict since, strictly this has no basis in international humanitarian law. However, when a prisoner is at imminent risk of torture or killing, and the only effective way to prevent these human rights abuses is for the prisoner to be released, Amnesty International may, as in this case, call for the prisoner to be released.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Burundi has been in a state of civil war since the coup attempt of 21 October 1993. Since then, more than 100,000 people have been killed by security forces or armed groups both Tutsi and Hutu. Torture is reported to be carried out systematically, and with impunity, in detention centres belonging to the security forces. Deaths in custody are also often reported. 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 Tutsi and Hutu armed groups have continued.

In the conflict since 1993, Roman Catholic priests, bishops and other church figures have been singled out particularly by Tutsi armed groups and also by the army apparently because of their influential role within the Hutu community.

Additionally some religious officials from within both the Tutsi and Hutu communities have openly expressed support for armed groups or are openly affiliated with them.

In early 1995, a splinter group of the ruling *Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi* (FRODEBU), Front for Democracy in Burundi, frustrated by the negotiations which were stripping them of the power they had gained from the elections of 1993, created the *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD), National Council for the Defence of Democracy, and an armed wing, the *Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (FDD), Forces for the Defence of Democracy. This and other Hutu-led groups seem to have an upper hand in the ongoing struggle in the country. As a consequence, some Tutsi members of the government called for the "surveillance and denunciation of enemies", these being understood as mainly the Hutu people. Many young Hutu people are regularly arrested or

killed by the Tutsi dominated army on the grounds that they are "assailants" or "helping the enemy".

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express/airmail letters in French or your own language:**

- expressing deep concern at the reported abduction of Anastase Uwizera by members of the FDD on 24 September 1996 and his subsequent "disappearance";
- urging that CNDD/FDD leaders urgently establish his whereabouts and order his immediate release as his safety cannot be guaranteed;
- urging CNDD/FDD leaders to publicly condemn human rights abuses by their supporters and for the CNDD leadership to make it clear to its members and supporters that attacks on unarmed civilians will not be tolerated;
- urging them to investigate and denounce human rights abuses committed by their own or other armed groups.

**APPEALS TO:**

Head of the National Council for the Defence of Democracy

Leonard Nyangoma

*Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie*

c/o Coordinateur des activités du CNDD en Europe, Jean NGENDANGANYA

91 route de Sion, 3960 Sierre, Switzerland

**Fax: + 41 27 55 20 14 (if voice, ask for fax)**

**Salutation: Dear Sir**

CNDD Coordinator for Africa

Innocent NIMPAGARITSE

PO BOX 24345

Nairobi, KENYA

**Fax: + 254 257 15 15**

**Salutation: Dear Sir**

CNDD Spokesperson

Jerome NDIHO

Belgium

**Fax : + 32 10 22 79 92 (if voice ask of fax; if ansaphone, call later or leave message)**

**Salutation: Dear Sir**

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 25 November 1996.