

EXTERNAL

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Fear of ill-treatment and torture

21 October 1997

BURUNDI At least 3,000 Burundi and Congolese (DRC) nationals

An estimated 3,000 detainees at the *Brigade de Gatumba*, gendarmerie station, Gatumba, Rural Bujumbura province, are at risk of ill-treatment or torture.

Approximately 10,000 people were arrested after members of the security forces, including members of the army and gendarmerie, surrounded the town of Gatumba, near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), during the night of 18 October 1997. All those arrested were taken to the *brigade* in Gatumba. As many as eight people, including seven children, are reported to have died in custody from suffocation, shortly after the arrests. It is feared that more detainees may die as a result of harsh detention conditions. Detainees are routinely tortured in the early stages of detention in brigades.

According to government officials, the arrests are to facilitate identity checks by the civilian and military authorities to counter an increase in attacks by armed opposition groups and armed robberies in the area. All those with valid papers are reported to have been released on the afternoon of 19 October, then paid money to the authorities. The arrests coincide with a statement by the Minister of Interior noting an increase in cross border attacks by Hutu-dominated armed groups from bases in Tanzania. The statement alleges that members of the armed groups are reported to pass through the DRC from Gatumba, and from there into Tanzania via Lake Tanganyika. Some sources report that those arrested are suspected of having links with armed groups. A number of Congolese nationals were among those arrested.

Detainees accused of participation in, or collaboration with armed groups are routinely tortured, often to extract information or a confession. At least three men, who had been arrested on suspicion of links with armed groups, died as a result of torture in May 1997 at another military camp known as Socarti, in the Kamenge district of Bujumbura.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although Major Pierre Buyoya promised to end human rights violations when he came to power after a coup d'état in July 1996, Amnesty International has since documented thousands of cases of extrajudicial execution, "disappearance", arbitrary arrest and torture. Critics and opponents of the government have also been harassed, arrested and tortured.

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 or trial. At least 150 death sentences have been passed after unfair trials. Six people were executed in July 1997. Torture and ill-treatment of detainees is routine in Burundi and Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of "disappearance", torture and death in custody.

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

- seeking urgent assurances that the physical security of all detainees in Gatumba brigade will be assured and that immediate practical steps will be taken to ensure they are not subjected to ill-treatment or torture, and that they are not held in conditions that could endanger their lives;

- requesting that the death of at least eight people at Gatumba brigade, including seven children, be investigated and, if found to be true, those responsible for causing their death to be removed from positions of responsibility for detainees and brought to justice ;
- seeking clarification of the reasons for the arrest and continued detention of the detainees, calling for their cases to be properly investigated and for the detainees to be released if they are not to be promptly charged with recognizably criminal offences, in accordance with the Burundi Code of Penal Procedure;
- calling on the authorities to allow the detainees immediate access to their families, legal counsel, medical care and representatives of humanitarian organizations.

APPEALS TO:

Chief of Defence Staff

Lt-Col Vincent NIYUNGEKO, Ministère Defense, Bumbura, Burundi
Chef de l'Etat-major général des Forces armées
Etat-major général des Forces armées
Ministère de la Défense nationale
Bujumbura, Burundi

Telegrams: Ministère de la Défense nationale, Bujumbura, Burundi

Fax: 257 22 21 48

Salutation: Monsieur le Chef de l'Etat-Major

Minister for Internal Affairs and Public Security

Lt-Col. Epitace BAYAGANAKANDI
Ministre de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité Publique
Ministère de l'Intérieur
Bujumbura, Burundi

Telegram : Ministre Interieur, Bujumbura, Burundi

Fax: 257 22 21 48 / 257 21 30 55

Salutation : Monsieur le Ministre

Minister of Defence

Lieutenant-Col. Firmin SINZOYIHEBA
Ministre de la Défense Nationale
Ministère de la Défense
Bujumbura, Burundi

Fax: 257 21 75 05

Telegrams: Ministre Defense, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES TO:

President

Major Pierre BUYOYA
Président de la République
Présidence de la République
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: 257 22 74 90

Prime Minister

Pascal Firmin NDIMIRA
Premier Ministre

Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: 257 22 64 24

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 2 December 1997.