

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Health/Legal Concern

7 January 1991

RWANDA : Thomas Karakire, businessman
Evariste Sisi, businessman

The two detainees named above are in solitary confinement and are in serious ill-health. They are among more than 2,000 people arrested between October and December 1990 for political reasons who are still detained. They are not known to have been charged with any criminal offence. Many of those still held may be imprisoned because they are believed by the authorities not to support the government against the Uganda-based predominantly Tutsi rebels who attacked Rwanda in October 1990.

Thomas Karakire and Evariste Sisi are among several dozen prisoners confined to special punishment cells in Kigali central prison. The cells are small, lit by only a small, barred opening in their doors with one or two prisoners held in each cell. Those held in punishment cells are apparently not allowed out of their cells for exercise and rarely receive visits from their relatives. Elsewhere in Rwanda, conditions in punishment cells are even worse, with completely unlit cells (known as "cachots noirs", black cells, because no light whatsoever penetrates them).

Thomas Karakire is reported to have been suffering from pneumonia before his arrest and his health is reported to have deteriorated while in custody.

It is unclear why either Thomas Karakire or Evariste Sisi have been put in punishment cells, or how long they will be kept there.

The two are among more than 5,000 people detained in October 1990, of whom more than 2,000 are reportedly still in prison, following an attack on northeast Rwanda by Uganda-based Rwandese exiles. The Rwandese authorities have only acknowledged that 1,566 of these are still held. Some of them have been charged and 25 so far brought to trial.

There have been reports that many detainees who were in ill-health before their arrest or have fallen ill since their arrest have not received prompt or adequate medical care. At least one Rwandese detainee who was ill before he was arrested died in custody in early October and at least five other Rwandese detainees are reported to have died in recent weeks as a result of a dysentery attack in Butare prison.

Amnesty International is concerned that the two people mentioned above and others held in punishment cells, particularly any held in completely unlit cells, are being subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment contrary to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Rwanda acceded in 1975. The organization is also concerned that these two have not been found guilty of any crime and that they and others arrested with them may be held solely on the basis of their ethnic origin or non-violent political views, rather than because of their involvement in the rebel attack.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The attack launched on northeast Rwanda at the beginning of October 1990 resembles several others carried out in the early 1960s by Rwandese exiles based in Uganda and other neighbouring countries. The attacks followed the overthrow in 1959 of the Tutsi monarch and subsequent intercommunal violence between the minority Tutsi and majority Hutu which led to the killing of hundreds

and the flight to exile of tens of thousands of Tutsi. These exiles were responsible for the attacks in the early 1960s and also for this October attack.

At the end of October 1990 government troops took control of most of the towns occupied by the rebels at the beginning of the fighting. The rebels are now reported to have dispersed to various parts of northern Rwanda where they reportedly continue to attack government troops.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telexes/telegrams/airmail letters, in French if possible:

- expressing concern at the reported detention of Thomas Karakire and Evariste Sisi in solitary confinement in punishment cells at Kigali prison and inquiring whether they are still held;
- expressing concern at reports that Thomas Karakire has received no medical attention for the pneumonia from which he has been suffering since his arrest and urging that be given prompt and regular medical attention;
- pointing out that the confinement of these two untried political detainees to cramped, unlit cells, from which they are reportedly not allowed out for exercise, appears to constitute cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment and urging the authorities to move them out of such cells promptly and ensure that they are not isolated or deprived of adequate physical exercise and medical care;
- urging the authorities to allow these two and all other detainees to receive visits immediately from their relatives, where possible, legal representatives and humanitarian organizations;
- expressing concern that Thomas Karakire and Evariste Sisi may be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned on account of their ethnic origin or their non-violent political views, rather than because there is evidence that they have committed any criminal offence;
- inquiring whether either of the two has been charged and urging that, if they have not, the authorities should review the need for their continuing detention, to ensure that all prisoners against whom there is inadequate evidence to receive a conviction can be released.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence Président HABYARIMANA Juvénal
Président de la République
BP 15

Kigali, République Rwandaise

Telegrams: President Habyarimana, Kigali, Rwanda

Telexes: 22517

Monsieur MUGEMANA Jean-Marie Vianney
Ministre de l'Intérieur et du développement communal
Ministère de l'Intérieur
BP 446

Kigali, République Rwandaise

Telegrams: Ministre Mugemana, Kigali, Rwanda

Telexes: 22502

Monsieur MUJYANAMA Théoneste
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
BP 160

Kigali, République Rwandaise

Telegrams: Ministre Mujyanama, Kigali, Rwanda

Telexes: 22502

Monsieur le Docteur BIZIMUNGU Casimir
Ministre des Affaires étrangères et de la coopération
Ministère des Affaires étrangères
BP 179

Kigali, République Rwandaise

Telegrams: Ministre des Affaires etrangeres, Kigali, Rwanda

COPIES TO:

- Rédacteur-en-Chef, Imvaho, BP 83, Kigali, République Rwandaise
 - Rédacteur-en-Chef, Kinyamateka, BP 761, Kigali, République Rwandaise
 - Rédacteur-en-Chef, La Relève, Office rwandaise d'information, BP 83,
Kigali, République Rwandaise
- and to diplomatic representatives of Rwanda in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 February 1991.