

RWANDA

Fear for safety of parliamentarians following party leader's arrest

Amnesty International is concerned about a pattern of harassment of political opponents and critics of the government. This concern has been sparked off most recently by the dismissal from the Transitional National Assembly on 9 March 1999 of Eustache Nkerinka, Jacques Maniraguha and Jean-Léonard Bizimana, parliamentarians of the political party *Mouvement démocratique républicain* (MDR), Democratic Republican Movement, who have voiced public criticism of the government. Amnesty International is appealing to the Rwandese authorities to prevent human rights violations against them.

The dismissal of these parliamentarians follows the arrest of the former president of the MDR, Bonaventure Ubalijoro, on 27 February 1999. Amnesty International is concerned that his arrest may have been prompted by his public criticisms of the government and is calling on the Rwandese authorities to clarify the formal charges against him and guarantee that his full legal rights will be respected, including access to a lawyer and visits from his family.

Arrest of Bonaventure Ubalijoro

Bonaventure Ubalijoro, aged 61, a former government official and former president of the MDR, was arrested by soldiers on 27 February 1999, at his home in Rutongo, in the *préfecture* (region) of Kigali Rural. At first the soldiers did not tell him that he was under arrest; they claimed that the *préfet* (local government official) wanted to see him. Instead, he was taken to the brigade of the gendarmerie in the district of Remera, in Kigali, where he has since been detained. His wife has been able to visit him there; however, on 10 March, she was reportedly refused permission to see him.

Bonaventure Ubalijoro is not known to have been questioned since his arrest and no formal charges are known to have been brought against him.

He is reportedly facing various accusations, including allegations that he is sympathetic to the ongoing insurgency in Rwanda and to extremist, anti-Tutsi ideologies. He is also accused of involvement in ordering massacres of Tutsi in the 1960s when he was head of the national intelligence services.

Amnesty International is not in a position to judge whether these accusations are well-founded. However, the organization is concerned that his arrest may have been motivated by his public criticism of the government. Although the Rwandese Government and the National Assembly include several members of the MDR, a number of MDR members are perceived as political opponents. Bonaventure Ubalijoro is one of several MDR members who have always been outspoken and have publicly expressed views different from those of the government; for example he and others have called for elections and have criticized government policies and actions, including in the context of debates on democracy and reconciliation.

Bonaventure Ubalijoro had held various government posts since the 1960s, under the former governments of Grégoire Kayibanda and Juvénal Habyarimana. Under both governments, he was among a number of Hutu politicians targeted by Hutu extremists for being “pro-Tutsi”.

After the present government came to power in July 1994, he became president of the MDR party from 1995 until July 1998, when a power struggle erupted within the party and the Prime Minister, Pierre-Célestin Rwigema, declared himself president of the MDR, ousting Bonaventure Ubalijoro on the basis that his political ideas were not conducive to national reconciliation. In 1997, the government appointed Bonaventure Ubalijoro managing director of the state-owned petrol company, Petro-Rwanda. In December 1998, he was dismissed from this post.

The MDR is effectively split into two factions: one faction which could currently be described as an “opposition faction”, which has been critical of the government and has been gradually marginalized from the political scene; and another, led by Prime Minister Pierre-Célestin Rwigema, which broadly supports the policies of the government. The divisions have attracted extensive coverage in the Rwandese press. Several articles in newspapers close to the government have accused “opposition” MDR members of supporting Hutu extremism - an accusation commonly levelled at critics of the government, sometimes without foundation.

Amnesty International is calling upon the Rwandese Government to clarify whether Bonaventure Ubalijoro has been formally charged - and if so, what are the charges against him - and to ensure that any accusations against him will be fully and independently investigated. The authorities should also provide guarantees that he will not be ill-treated and that he will be granted his full rights including access to a lawyer and visits from his family.

Fears for the safety of MDR members of the Transitional National Assembly

On 9 March 1999, in a meeting of representatives of all the political parties, Eustache Nkerinka, Jacques Maniraguha and Jean-Léonard Bizimana, MDR members of the Transitional National Assembly who have been publicly critical of the government for several years, were dismissed from the Transitional National Assembly.

A fourth, Jean-Baptiste Sebarame, was also dismissed; he had previously been suspended and has been the object of judicial investigations into his alleged participation in the 1994 genocide. His trial began in Rwanda in 1997 but has not been concluded. Amnesty International is not in a position to judge whether the accusations against him are well-founded.

The four MDR members of the Transitional National Assembly have been given 15 days in which to formally resign and have been informed that if they don't resign, they will be

sacked. This move comes after continued pressure from Prime Minister Pierre-Célestin Rwigema for them to resign following their public disagreements with certain policies of the MDR and the government.

The decision to dismiss them was announced publicly on 11 March by Charles Murigande, Secretary-General of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF¹) and chair of the newly-created Forum of Political Parties. It would appear that the move to dismiss them was proposed by the MDR, on the initiative of Prime Minister Pierre-Célestin Rwigema, and subsequently, the Forum of Political Parties and the Transitional National Assembly voted in favour of it. However, the Speaker of the Transitional National Assembly, Joseph Sebarenzi, has protested to the President of Rwanda about attempts to make the parliamentarians resign.

Like Bonaventure Ubalijoro, these MDR members of the Transitional National Assembly have been the object of hostile articles in the press for several months. Among the reasons given for their dismissal were accusations that they are not in favour of national unity and reconciliation and that they collaborate with “infiltrators” (members of the armed opposition) - another accusation often used to discredit political opponents. At least one of them has also been criticized for denouncing human rights violations by the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) and for speaking to foreign media. Like Jean-Baptiste Sebarame, Jean-Léonard Bizimana is also being accused of involvement in the 1994 genocide.

It is feared that these parliamentarians may be arrested for political reasons or be subjected to other human rights violations. Over the last two years, various members of the Transitional National Assembly who have been critical of the government have been subjected to threats and harassment, as well as violent attacks. For example, Eustache Nkerinka escaped what appeared to be an assassination attempt in Kigali in June 1997; his home had previously been attacked and searched on several occasions since 1995. Another member of the Transitional National Assembly, Evariste Burakali of the *Parti Libéral* (Liberal Party), was shot dead by a soldier in the northern region of Byumba in January 1997.² At least one other has fled the country, fearing for his safety.

Amnesty International is calling upon the Rwandese Government to ensure that the right to freedom of expression is respected and that these or other parliamentarians will not be subjected to human rights violations because of the peaceful expression of their opinions or criticisms of the government.

¹ In most aspects of daily political life, the RPF remains the dominant party in both the government and the Transitional National Assembly.

² For further details of these two cases, please refer to the Amnesty International report *Rwanda: Ending the silence*, published in September 1997 (AI Index AFR 47/32/97).

Note: On 12 March it was reported in the international media that the Prime Minister Pierre-Célestin Rwigema was also facing accusations of participation in the 1994 genocide. Amnesty International has not yet been able to verify these reports.