

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

19 May 1998

RWANDA Fidèle Uwizeye, government employee

There are fears for the safety of Fidèle Uwizeye, whose current whereabouts are unknown.

Fidèle Uwizeye - former *préfet* (local government official) of Gitarama under the previous government of Rwanda - worked in the department of communal development at the Ministry of Interior, Communal Development and Social Reintegration under the current government. He was arrested on 1 May 1998 at his home in the capital, Kigali. The charges against him are not known. He was initially detained at the gendarmerie at Remera in Kigali. On 5 May, he was reportedly transferred to another detention centre, the location of which has not been disclosed. On around 9 May, his relatives, who had been taking him food at the detention centre of the gendarmerie of Remera, were handed back his various personal belongings. Officials at the gendarmerie reportedly stated that Fidèle Uwizeye had been transferred to another detention centre, but refused to reveal his whereabouts. They reportedly told the family not to return.

The exact motives for the arrest of Fidèle Uwizeye are not known. Some individuals have reportedly accused him of having participated in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

Fidèle Uwizeye had testified in Arusha, Tanzania, as a defence witness in the trial of Jean-Paul Akayesu, a former local government official indicted by the International Criminal for Rwanda (ICTR) - the tribunal set up by the United Nations to try the main leaders and organizers of the genocide. It is unclear whether Fidèle Uwizeye's arrest and possible "disappearance" are related to his testifying at Arusha. There have been other cases of individuals in Rwanda who had acted as defence witnesses for people accused of genocide or indicated their willingness to do so and have been subsequently subjected to human rights violations, including killings and threats.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The number of "disappearances" in Rwanda has increased significantly since 1997. In many cases, the "disappeared" individuals are likely to have been killed. In other cases, they are likely to be held in unacknowledged or secret detention centres, including military detention centres to which the authorities almost always deny access to the detainees' relatives and to humanitarian and human rights organizations. Detainees in these detention centres have reportedly been subjected to ill-treatment. There have also been cases of killings of detainees. In addition, the conditions in many detention centres amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

There are currently around 130,000 people detained in prisons and detention centres across Rwanda, the majority accused of participation in the genocide which claimed as many as one million lives in 1994. While many of the detainees are believed to be guilty, a significant proportion are widely believed to be innocent. Amnesty International is not in a position to judge the innocence or guilt of specific individuals, but is concerned about a pattern of arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention without charge or trial.

Individuals associated with the former government of Rwanda are especially likely to be viewed with suspicion. Some are known to have played a leading role in the genocide, but others have been arrested without evidence of their actual participation, simply because of the position they occupied under the former government or because members of their families held such positions.

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

- asking for information on the current whereabouts of Fidèle Uwizeye and for this information to be immediately disclosed to members of his family;
- expressing concern for his safety following reports that he is being held in an undisclosed location after his reported transfer from the gendarmerie at Remera;
- asking for assurances that his safety and physical well-being are guaranteed;
- calling for him to have access to visits from members of his family, from a lawyer and from humanitarian and human rights organizations;
- asking for the reasons for his arrest and the charges against him to be made public.

APPEALS TO:

Sheikh Abdul Karim HARELIMANA
Ministre de l'Intérieur, du Développement communal
et de la Réintégration sociale
BP 446, Kigali, Rwanda

Telegrams: Minister Interior, Kigali, Rwanda

Fax: +250 83170

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Colonel Marcel GATSINZI
Chef d'Etat-Major de la Gendarmerie
BP 359, Kigali, Rwanda

Telegrams: Chief of Staff, Gendarmerie, Kigali, Rwanda

Fax: +250 86267

Salutation: Monsieur le Chef d'Etat-Major / Dear Colonel Gatsinzi

Pierre-Célestin RWIGEMA
Premier Ministre
BP 1334, Kigali, Rwanda

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Kigali, Rwanda

Fax: +250 83714

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre / Dear Prime Minister

COPIES TO:

diplomatic representatives of RWANDA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 June 1998.