

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 169/97

Torture / Fear of "Disappearance"

16 December 1997

**BURUNDI** Etienne MVUYEKURE, Geological Engineer, former Secretary General of the *Rassemblement du peuple burundais* (RPB), Rally for Burundi People, a political opposition party

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Amnesty International is extremely concerned for the safety of Etienne Mvuyekure, arrested on 1 or 2 November 1997, and fears he is at risk of torture and "disappearance". Prison authorities have denied all access to him since 10 November. No explanation has been given for this, raising concern for his physical integrity.

Etienne Mvuyekure was arrested in the Rweza *secteur* of Kavumu *colline* (administrative unit), Bujumbura, by a Commander of the Muyira Zone military position. He is reported to have been beaten before being transported, by an army truck, to the nearby *bataillon paracommando* (commando camp) in Bujumbura. He was transferred some days later to Mpimba central prison, Bujumbura, where he was initially allowed access to visitors, including family and non-governmental organizations.

It appears that he has been arrested as a result of accusations made against him of possible links with an armed opposition group.

#### **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 documented thousands of cases of extrajudicial execution, "disappearance", arbitrary arrest and torture since that date. Critics and opponents of the government have also been harassed, arrested and tortured, with the aim of eliminating effective political opposition.

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 detained without charge or trial. Torture and ill-treatment of detainees is routine in Burundi particularly in the early stages of detention. Amnesty International has also documented numerous cases of "disappearance" of detainees. At least three men arrested on suspicion of links with armed groups died as a result of torture in May 1997 at a military camp known as Socarti in the Kamenge district of Bujumbura. Over 200 death sentences have been passed since February 1996 after grossly unfair trials. Six people, at least one of whom - Stanislas Machini, a member of the RPB - claimed to have been tortured to extract a confession, were executed in July 1997.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes (no mail to Burundi) in French or your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of Etienne Mvuyekure, arrested on 1 or 2 November 1997;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate steps to protect the physical integrity of Etienne Mvuyekure and to allow him immediate access to his family, legal counsel, medical care and representatives of humanitarian organizations;
- calling on the authorities to investigate the accusation against Etienne Mvuyekure and for him to be released if he is not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to justice in accordance with international standards of fairness and without recourse to the death penalty;
- calling on the authorities to bring to justice, in accordance with international standards of fairness, officials who are found to have carried out or condoned human rights violations.

**APPEALS TO:**

**Regarding the fax numbers, a recorded message may sometimes be heard (may only last a couple of hours) stating that the number is out of order and to try later. The same number will often work on subsequent later attempts.**

President

Major Pierre BUYOYA  
Président de la République  
Présidence de la République

**Telegrams: Major Buyoya, Bujumbura, Burundi**  
**Faxes: + 257 22 74 90**  
**Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear President**

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Terence SINUNGURUZA  
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des sceaux  
Ministère de la Justice

**Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Bujumbura, Burundi**  
**Faxes: + 257 22 21 48**  
**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

Minister of Defence

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

**Telegrams: Ministre Defense, Bujumbura, Burundi**  
**Faxes: + 257 22 56 86**  
**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Prime Minister

Pascal Firmin NDIRIRA  
Premier Ministre  
Bujumbura, Burundi  
**Faxes: + 257 22 64 24**

Minister for Human Rights, Institutional Reform and Relations with the National Assembly

Eugène NINDORERA  
Ministre des droits de la Personne humaine, des réformes institutionnelles, et des relations avec  
l'Assemblée nationale  
Bujumbura, Burundi  
**Faxes: + 257 21 38 47**

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 20 January 1998.