

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 81/97

Fear for safety

5 June 1997

RWANDA Emmanuel Hitimana, human rights activist

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Emmanuel Hitimana, an investigator at the *Association rwandaise pour la défense des droits de l'homme* (ARDHO), Rwandese Association for the Defence of Human Rights, was arrested in his home area of Butamwa, in Rural Kigali, on 30 May 1997. News of his arrest only emerged four days later, on 3 June. His arrest was reportedly carried out on the orders of the local *bourgmestre* (district administrator). He is currently in detention in the communal detention centre (*cachot*) in Butamwa.

The official reasons for his arrest are not known. Some sources allege that it may be linked to an accusation of corruption, others, that he may have been arrested because of personal differences with the *bourgmestre*. However, he has reportedly not been charged with any specific offence. Amnesty International believes that his human rights activities may have been among the factors leading to his arrest.

Whatever the real motive for his arrest, Amnesty International considers that Emmanuel Hitimana's safety could be at risk, as he was known to be investigating sensitive cases of human rights violations in the context of his work at ARDHO.

ARDHO has been publishing regular reports on the human rights situation in Rwanda.

Sources in Kigali indicate that local judicial officials have been alerted to the arrest and have undertaken to investigate the accusations against him. The outcome of their investigations is not yet known.

To date there are no reports that Emmanuel Hitimana has been ill-treated. However, ill-treatment of detainees in communal detention centres is common.

In addition, conditions of detention across Rwanda are appalling and sometimes life-threatening, due to extreme overcrowding and inadequate facilities.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Independent human rights work in Rwanda has become increasingly dangerous in the context of a rapidly deteriorating human rights situation, especially since the beginning of 1997. In 1995, 1996 and 1997, individuals attempting to investigate or expose the truth about the current human rights situation have been subjected to human rights violations such as arbitrary arrest, detention without charge or trial, ill-treatment and extrajudicial execution. They have also been persistently harassed and intimidated. Those who still dare to speak out live in constant fear for their lives. The victims of these violations have included members of Rwandese human rights organizations, members of international organizations (including staff of the United Nations Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda), journalists and officials in the judiciary.

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

- asking for information as to why Emmanuel Hitimana has been arrested, and seeking assurances that his physical integrity and safety in custody will be guaranteed, and that he is allowed access to family and legal counsel while in detention;

- expressing concern that his arrest may have been connected with his investigations into reports of human rights violations and that if this is the real motive for his arrest, he would be a prisoner of conscience;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release unless he is charged with a recognizable criminal offence.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

Son Excellence Pasteur BIZIMUNGU

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**Telegrams: Président Bizimungu, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear President**

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**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

Minister of Justice

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**Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

Préfet of Kigali Rural

Dr Narcisse GAKUBA

Préfet de Kigali Rural

Préfecture de Kigali Rural

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**Telegrams: Préfet Kigali Rural, Rwanda**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Préfet / Dear Sir**

**COPIES TO:**

Vice-President and Minister of Defence

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**Salutation: Monsieur le Vice-Président / Dear Vice-President**

and 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 10 July 1997.