

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 47/38/97

UA 337/97

Fear of ill-treatment / fear for safety 29 October 1997
Arbitrary arrest

RWANDA Vincent Rwabukwisi, in his twenties, employee of a human rights organization

There are fears for the safety of Vincent Rwabukwisi who was arrested on 24 October 1997 and is currently in detention in Rusatira *commune*, in Rwanda's southern *préfecture* of Butare.

Vincent Rwabukwisi is an office worker for the human rights organization *Association rwandaise pour la défense des droits de la personne et des libertés publiques* (ADL), Rwandese Association for the Defence of Human Rights and Public Liberties. On 24 October, when he went to the *commune* (district) office in his home area of Rusatira to collect his new identity card, an *inspecteur de police judiciaire* (judicial police inspector) produced a case file which had been prepared in advance, reportedly accusing Vincent Rwabukwisi of participation in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Vincent Rwabukwisi was immediately arrested and remains in detention in the *cachot communal* (local detention centre) in Rusatira.

His family attempted to visit him in detention on 26 October but were not allowed to see him. They were only allowed to leave food for him.

It is not known whether Vincent Rwabukwisi has been ill-treated in detention, but ill-treatment is common in *cachots* across the country. Conditions of detention are also extremely harsh and often life-threatening, due to severe overcrowding and absence of hygiene and medical facilities.

Amnesty International is seeking further information on the motives for this arrest. It is not known whether his case file contains any formal charges or accusations of involvement in a specific crime - beyond the broad accusation of participation in the genocide. There are allegations that Vincent Rwabukwisi may have been wrongfully denounced by a family known to his own, for unconfirmed reasons. On several previous occasions, when he had gone to the *commune* office to register for his new identity card, the authorities had threatened to arrest him after a woman had reportedly denounced him as an *interahamwe* (one of the militia responsible for many killings during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994).

In the context of a pattern of harassment of human rights workers in Rwanda, there are also fears that he may have been arrested in connection with his work for ADL.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are more than 120,000 people detained in official prisons and detention centres across Rwanda. Most are accused of participation in the genocide which claimed as many as one million lives in 1994. Many are held without charge and most without trial.

While many detainees may well be guilty of participation in the genocide in Rwanda, a significant proportion are believed to be innocent. Arrests are often carried out on the basis of unsubstantiated and general accusations of "participation in the genocide". Many detainees do not even have a case file with details of specific accusations against them.

Numerous cases of arbitrary arrest have been reported. The victims have included individuals who have expressed criticism of the current government or who have denounced human rights abuses. Arbitrary arrests have also occurred in the context of settling of scores between families, or in the context of disputes over property and land. In almost all these cases, the individuals have been arrested following denunciations that they participated in the genocide. Such denunciations commonly occur when individuals register for their new identity card.

While there is no specific information linking the arrest of Vincent Rwabukwisi to his work at ADL, his arrest has occurred within a broader pattern of intimidation of individuals attempting to investigate or denounce human rights abuses in Rwanda. Human rights workers, journalists, judicial officials, priests, local government officials and others who have exposed current human rights abuses have in turn become victims of arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention without charge or trial, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution.

Others - including several members of ADL - have suffered various forms of harassment, including repeated threats to their safety.

Conditions of detention continue to cause daily deaths in detention as a result of severe overcrowding and absence of basic facilities. Deaths have also resulted from the deliberate ill-treatment of detainees in the *cachots communaux*; cases of ill-treatment have been reported with increasing frequency in 1997.

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

- asking for information on the reason for the arrest of Vincent Rwabukwisi and details of the specific accusations against him;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release unless he is formally charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- asking for assurances that he is not being ill-treated, that his safety will be guaranteed and that he is allowed access to family and legal counsel while in detention;
- expressing concern about the pattern of arbitrary arrests in Rwanda, in particular in the context of registration for identity cards.

PLEASE LIMIT APPEALS TO 10 PER SECTION.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Interior

Cheikh Abdul Karim HARELIMANA

Ministre de l'Intérieur

BP 446, Kigali, Rwanda

Faxes: +250 84373; 83374

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Intérieur, Kigali, Rwanda

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

Faustin NTEZIRYAYO

Ministre de la Justice

Ministère de la Justice

BP 160, KIGALI, Rwanda

Fax: +250 86509

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Kigali, Rwanda
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Préfet of Butare
Athanasé SEMUHUNGU
Préfet de Butare
Préfecture de Butare
BP 220, BUTARE, Rwanda

Telegrams: Préfet Butare, Rwanda
Salutation: Monsieur le Préfet / Dear Sir

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 10 December 1997.