

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 16/29/96

EXTRA 165/96

Fear for safety

25 October 1996

**BURUNDI Jean-Baptiste Bigirimana, catechist of the Roman Catholic church  
Jovin (family name not known), deacon of the Roman Catholic church**

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On 19 October 1996 two religious figures, Jovin, a deacon in Rutegama district (*commune*) and Jean-Baptiste Bigirimana a catechist in Munanira parish of the same district, were reportedly kidnapped in separate incidents by members of the security forces in Rutegama. They have not been seen since and their whereabouts are not known. Amnesty International fears that the two men are at imminent risk of "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution.

Jovin is reported to have been accused by the security forces of collaboration with Hutu armed groups active in the area. Jean-Baptiste Bigirimana appears to have been seized because he refused to leave parish buildings as instructed by soldiers based in the area who wished to occupy the buildings. The other members of the clergy occupying the buildings left and the premises were subsequently occupied by the security forces.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Burundi has been in a state of civil war since the coup attempt of 21 October 1993. Since then, more than 100,000 people have been killed by security forces or armed groups from both Tutsi and Hutu communities. Torture is reported to be carried out systematically, and with impunity, in detention centres belonging to the security forces. Deaths in custody are also often reported. Since the coup in July 1996 which returned Major Pierre Buyoya to power, the conflict has continued and human rights abuses by the government security forces and Tutsi and Hutu armed groups have continued.

In the conflict since 1993, Roman Catholic priests, bishops and other church figures have been singled out particularly by Tutsi armed groups and also by the army apparently because of their influential role within the Hutu community. Additionally some religious officials from within both the Tutsi and Hutu communities have openly expressed support for armed groups or are openly affiliated with them.

In early 1995, a splinter group of the then ruling *Front pour la démocratie au Burundi* (FRODEBU), Front for Democracy in Burundi, frustrated by the negotiations which were stripping them of the power they had gained from the elections of 1993, created the *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD), National Council for the Defence of Democracy. CNDD's armed wing is called the *Forces pour la défense de la démocratie* (FDD), Forces for the Defence of Democracy. Due to an increase in attacks by Hutu-led groups, some Tutsi members of the government called for the "surveillance and denunciation of enemies", these being understood as mainly Hutu. Many young Hutu are regularly arrested or killed by the Tutsi-dominated army on the grounds that they are "assailants" or "helping the enemy".

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams or faxes letters in French or your own language (there is currently no mail to Burundi - you may check if this situation has changed when are sending appeals):**

- expressing concern for the safety of Jovin and Jean-Baptiste Bigirimana who have not been seen since they were taken away by members of the security forces on 19 October 1996;

- calling on the authorities to urgently establish and make public the whereabouts of the two men and calling for immediate steps to be taken to guarantee their physical safety;
- asking for information on the reasons for their abduction;
- urging the authorities to promptly investigate the abductions and to bring to justice officials who have carried out or condoned this or other abductions, unlawful secret detentions or "disappearances" and to take effective measures to prevent any such human rights violations in the future.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

Major Pierre Buyoya  
Président de la République  
Présidence de la République  
BP 1870, Bujumbura, Burundi

**Fax: 257 22 7490**

**Telegrams: Major Buyoya, Bujumbura, Burundi**

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

Minister of Defence

Lieutenant Colonel Firmin Sinzoyiheba  
Ministre de la Défense nationale  
Ministère de la Défense nationale  
BP 20, BUJUMBURA, Burundi

**Fax : + 257 213 055**

**Telegrams: Ministre de la Défense, Bujumbura, Burundi**

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

Army Chief of Staff

Lieutenant Colonel Vincent Niyungeko  
Chef d'Etat-major général  
BP 20, Bujumbura, Burundi

**Fax: + 257 213 055**

**Telegrams: Chef d'Etat-major Général, Bujumbura, Burundi**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Chef d'Etat major / Dear name**

**COPIES TO:**

Minister of Justice

Gervais Rubashamiheto  
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des sceaux  
Ministère de la Justice  
BP 1880, Bujumbura, Burundi

**Fax: 257 22 2148**

Prime Minister

Monsieur Pascal-Firmin Ndimira  
Premier Ministre  
Présidence de la République  
BP 2800

Bujumbura, Burundi

**Fax: 257 22 6424**

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 25 November 1996.