

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 172/96

Fear of "disappearance"

7 November 1996

BURUNDI Melchior BIGIRIMANA, aged 36, engineer

Melchior Bigirimana, who returned to Burundi from exile in Zaire on 1 November 1996, has not been seen since 5 November. He has not been traced to any detention centre in Bujumbura and Amnesty International fears that he is at risk of "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution.

Melchior Bigirimana fled Burundi in 1991 because of his membership to the *Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu* (Palipehutu), Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People, an exclusively Hutu party, and had been in exile in Zaire since 1994. He returned to Burundi on 1 November and stayed with his family in a transit camp before being asked to appear before the Chief of Zone in Rohero district, Bujumbura on 5 November. He was allegedly taken at 6pm to the Embassy of Rwanda to check whether he had any legal problem in this country. There has been no news of him since.

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 both Tutsi and Hutu. The ethnic cleansing of Bujumbura and the targeting of Hutu intellectuals had driven most of them into exile mainly in neighbouring Zaire.

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, and an armed wing, the *Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie*, Forces for the Defence of Democracy. This and other Hutu-led groups seem to have an upper hand in the ongoing armed conflict in the country. As a consequence, some Tutsi members of the government called for the "surveillance and denunciation of enemies", these being understood as mainly the Hutu people. Many young Hutu are regularly arrested or killed by the Tutsi-dominated army on the grounds that they are "assailants" or "helping the enemy".

The on-going war in Eastern Zaire and attacks on refugee camps by Tutsi-led armed groups in Zaire have forced at least 5,000 Hutu refugees to return to their country. Reports received by Amnesty International indicate that a number of these returnees have been summarily executed.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes (there is currently no mail to Burundi) in English/French or your own language:

- expressing deep concern at the reported "disappearance" of Melchior Bigirimana;
- urging that Burundi authorities urgently establish and make public his whereabouts and allow him immediate access to his relatives and human rights organisations;
- urging the authorities to release Melchior Bigirimana unless he has been charged with a recognizable criminal offence;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate measures to protect returnees and other unarmed civilians from human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", arbitrary arrests and torture.

APPEALS TO:

1) Minister of Interior

Lieutenant-Colonel Epitace BAYAKANAKANDI

Ministre de l'Intérieur

Ministère de l'Intérieur

Faxes: +257 222148 or 213055

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Interieur, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

2) Gendarmerie Chief of Staff

Lieutenant-Colonel Georges MUKORAKO

Chef d'Etat-Major de la Gendarmerie Nationale

Faxes: +257 222148; 213055

Telegrams: Chef d'Etat Major Mukorako, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Chef d'Etat-Major/Dear Chief of Staff

3) Minister of Justice

Monsieur Gervais RUBASHAMIHETO

Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux

Ministère de la Justice

Faxes: +257 222148

Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

4) Minister for Human Rights

Madame Christine RUHAZA

Ministre des Droits de la Personne

Ministère des Droits de la Personne

Faxes: +257 216102

Telegrams: Ministre Ruhaza, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Madame le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Major Pierre Buyoya

Président de la République

Présidence de la République

BP 1870, Bujumbura, Burundi

Faxes: +257 227490

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 7 December 1996.