

PUBLIC

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UA 242/06 Fear for safety / Harassment

BURUNDI Gabriel Nikundana (m), journalist

Gabriel Nikundana, news editor of the independent radio station *Isanganiro* in the capital Bujumbura, has been harassed by members of the ruling party, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (*Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie*, CNDD-FDD). His life may be in danger.

On 24 August, *Isanganiro* broadcast an interview with the opposition political leader, Alain Mugabarabona, who is detained along with at least six others in Bujumbura prison in relation to an alleged coup attempt earlier this year (see UA 210/06, AFR 16/012/2006, 3 August 2006, and follow-up). During the interview, Alain Mugabarabona claimed that he and the other detainees had been tortured by security services personnel in order to extract "confessions". He also claimed that the alleged coup attempt was a fabrication orchestrated by the CNDD-FDD.

On 3 September, the CNDD-FDD website published a photograph of Gabriel Nikundana, saying that he had fled to Kenya. When it became clear that this story was false, on 5 September another article was published on the website, linking Gabriel Nikundana to the alleged coup attempt and describing him as the "most extremist journalist" at the *Isanganiro* radio station.

In 2001, Gabriel Nikundana was arrested and charged with belonging to an armed opposition group and broadcasting enemy propaganda in a time of war ("*informations faisant la propagande de l'ennemi de la nation burundaise en temps de guerre*") after the independent radio station where he worked at the time broadcast an interview with the commander of an armed opposition group, the National Liberation Forces (*Forces nationales de liberation*, FNL).(see UA 58/01, AFR 16/013/2001, 14 March 2001, and follow-ups).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In August 2005, the CNDD-FDD, the former main opposition armed movement, won the first elections to be held in Burundi since the assassination of President Mechior Ndadaye in October 1993. Since then, tensions between the CNDD-FDD and the country's independently-owned radio stations have continually worsened.

On 3 September 2006, on the commemoration of the electoral victory of the CNDD-FDD, the party's chairman, Hussein Radjabu, made a speech in front of thousands of supporters, in which he attacked Burundi's independent media. He notably implied that journalists and media workers could die if they carried on criticising the government.

Amnesty International and other national and international human rights organisations have previously criticised the practices of the security services in Burundi, including reports that those opposed to the CNDD-FDD are particularly at risk of torture. On 11 August, Nureldin Satti, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, expressed concern for those detained in relation to the alleged coup attempt, urging the Burundian authorities to respect the human rights of its citizens, particularly with regard to allegations of torture.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Gabriel Nikundana, who has been harassed by members of the National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (*Conseil national pour la defense de la democratie- Forces pour la defense de la democratie*, CNDD-FDD), purely as a result of his peaceful and legitimate activities as a journalist;
- noting that his life may be at risk following the publication of an article on the CNDD-FDD website linking him to the alleged coup attempt of 31 July 2006 and labelling him as an "extremist", particularly in the light of comments made by the party's chairman implying that the lives of journalists were at risk if they criticised the government;
- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of Gabriel Nikundana;
- calling on the Burundian government to ensure that all journalists are allowed to work independently, without fear of attacks, harassment or other human rights violations.

APPEALS TO:

(It may be difficult to get through to fax numbers in Burundi; please keep trying)

Chairman of the CNDD-FDD

Monsieur Hussein Radjabu
Permanence du parti CNDD-FDD
Bujumbura
Burundi

Fax: + 257 25 01 91

Email: cndd-fdd@burundi-info.com
info@burundi-info.com

Salutation: Monsieur / Dear Sir

Government Spokesperson

Monsieur Karenga Ramadhani
Ministre de l'information, de la Communication, des Relations avec le Parlement et Porte-Parole du
Gouvernement
2e Bdg de l'INSS
Chaussée Prince Rwagasore
BP 1080, Bujumbura, Burundi

Fax: + 257 22 17 66

+ 257 21 63 18

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES 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 October 2006.