

Joint statement

Burundi: 21 international and Burundian human rights organisations condemn new irregularities in the case of Germain Rukuki

Almost four months after his appeal hearing at the Bujumbura Court of Appeal on 26 November 2018, the judicial case file of Burundian human rights defender, Germain Rukuki, has gone missing. In December 2018, the Government of Burundi decided to divide the Bujumbura Court of Appeal into three separate appeal courts, and the file apparently went missing during the reorganization.

Germain is appealing against his wrongful conviction by the Ntahangwa High Court and 32-year prison sentence, the longest prison sentence imposed on a human rights defender in Burundi. He is still awaiting the Court's decision, which was initially expected within 30-days of the appeal hearing.

The loss of his case file further violates Germain Rukuki's right to a fair trial, in addition to the multiple irregularities and undue delays that have characterized the legal proceedings since his arrest in July 2017.

We, the undersigned non-governmental organisations, strongly condemn this blatant miscarriage of justice and insist that Germain's conviction is unlawful and part of a pattern of systematic attacks against human rights defenders and dissent voices since 2015, as echoed by the international human rights community, international and national civil society, as well as the United Nations and the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi in its [report](#) released in September 2018.

We, the undersigned organisations, call on Burundian authorities to:

- Release Germain Rukuki immediately and unconditionally, and quash his conviction and sentence;
- Comply with international and regional human rights standards, notably the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and the right to a fair trial;
- Until he is released, ensure Germain Rukuki and his lawyer have timely and adequate access to his case file;
- Launch an immediate, effective, impartial and transparent investigation into the circumstances of and responsibility for the loss of Germain Rukuki's file;
- Recognise the legitimacy of human rights work in Burundi and ensure a safe and enabling environment in which it is possible to defend and promote human rights without fear of punishment, reprisal or intimidation.

The support of the international community, the diplomatic representations in Burundi, the African Union and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as the African regional leaders in particular, remains crucial at this stage.

We therefore urge the international community to:

- Advocate for the release of Germain Rukuki and respect for international fair trial standards;
- Until he is released, continue monitoring Germain Rukuki's legal proceedings and pay regular visits to him in jail;
- Publicly communicate their support for and solidarity with Germain Rukuki and his family;
- Publicly condemn the policy of harassment, including arbitrary detention and prosecution, of human rights defenders in Burundi.

For media inquiries, please contact ao@protectioninternational.org // +32 2 609 44 05.

Signatories:

1. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT-Burundi)
2. Agir Ensemble pour le Droits de l'Homme (AEDH)
3. Association des Journalistes Burundais en Exil (AJBE)
4. Amnesty International
5. Campagne "Tournons la page"
6. Coalition Burundaise des Défenseurs des droits de l'homme (CBDDH)
7. Coalition Burundaise pour la Cour Pénale Internationale (CB CPI)
8. Collectif des Avocats pour la Défense des Victimes de crimes de droit international commis au Burundi (CAVIB)
9. Coalition de la Société Civile pour le Monitoring Electoral (COSOME)
10. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
11. Fédération internationale des ACAT (FIACAT)
12. Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
13. Forum Pour le Renforcement de la Societe Civile (FORSC)
14. Front Line Defenders
15. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
16. Ligue Burundaise des Droits de l'Homme Iteka
17. Mouvement des femmes et filles pour la paix et la securite au Burundi (MFFPS)
18. Observatoire de Lutte contre la Corruption et les Malversations Economiques (OLUCOME)
19. Organisation Mondiale contre la Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
20. Protection International
21. Réseau des Citoyens Probes (RCP)