

UA 06/01

Fear of T**BURUNDIA** at least six people, including:**Daniel Nsanzurwimo, local government official**

At least six people, including a local government official, were arrested on or around 4 January. They are reportedly held incommunicado at the Gakumbu army camp, near the airport, where they are at severe risk of torture.

The arrests came nearly one month after a civilian aircraft was hit by gunfire as it came in to land at the capital, Bujumbura. Daniel Nsanzurwimo, who is the local administration official in charge of nearby Rukaramu, in Mutimbuzi commune, is reportedly accused of failing to warn the authorities about the attack. The basis for this accusation is not known. All those arrested are from Rukaramu.

On 4 December an aircraft from the Belgian airline SABENA was attacked as it approached Bujumbura airport. It landed safely and no one was seriously injured. Amnesty International condemns the attack.

The Burundian government blamed the attack on an armed opposition group, the *Forces nationales de libération* (FNL), National Liberation Forces, which is active around Bujumbura. Shortly before the attack, the FNL had announced it was stepping up its activities, and called on foreigners to leave the country. The FNL has denied responsibility, and has accused members of the armed forces of being behind the attack.

SABENA has suspended flights to Burundi. The airline had only resumed flights to Bujumbura in October 2000, having suspended flights to Burundi after an embargo was imposed in July 1996.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture and ill-treatment are routine in the early stages of detention in Burundi. The problem is particularly acute in military custody, as detainees are often held incommunicado in illegal places of detention, and denied access to their families and to humanitarian and human rights organizations. People suspected of links with armed opposition groups are particularly vulnerable and are systematically subjected to beatings, tied in very painful positions, deprived of food and threatened with death. Several detainees are known to have died in custody last year as a result of torture.

Many of reports of "disappearance" are impossible to confirm, as relatives have no access to detainees and the authorities refuse to say where they are held. Relatives may be told without further explanation that a detainee is no longer held, or has never been held, creating fear that the detainee has been killed. In some cases, this fear is well-founded. In others, the detainee may have been transferred to a different place of detention and may subsequently "reappear".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, English or your own language (please check with your post office whether postal services are functioning to Burundi):

- calling for humanitarian and human rights organizations, lawyers and the families of the detainees in Gakumbu military camp to be given immediate access to them;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate action to establish the identities of those detained and to protect them from torture and "disappearance";
- calling on the authorities to state publicly why they were arrested, and to release them if they are not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence for which there is substantiating evidence;
- if they are to remain in custody, calling for them to be moved to a civilian place of detention.

APPEALS TO:

Please note it can be difficult to get faxes through. You may be told by the operator that the line is not working or the number is wrong. Please keep trying.

Minister of Defence

Colonel Cyrille NDAYIRUKIYE
Ministre de la Défense Nationale
Ministère de la Défense Nationale
BP 1870 Bujumbura
Burundi

Telegram: Ministre Defense, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

Fax: + 257 22 39 59 / 21 75 05

Chief of Defence Staff

Général Major Vincent NIYUNGEKO
Chef de l'Etat-major général des Forces armées
Etat-major général des Forces armées
Ministère de la Défense nationale
BP 1870 Bujumbura, Burundi

Telegram: Chef Etat Major, Forces armées, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Chef de l'Etat-major/Dear Chief of Defence Staff

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Procureur Général de la République

Monsieur Gérard NGENDABANKA
Procureur Général de la République
Bujumbura
Burundi

Telegrams: Procureur general, Bujumbura, Burundi

Fax: + 257 24 15 03

Salutation: Monsieur le Procureur général de la République / Dear State Public Prosecutor

COPIES TO:

Minister for Human Rights, Institutional Reform and Relations with the National Assembly

Eugène NINDORERA, Ministre des droits de la Personne humaine, des réformes institutionnelles, et des relations avec l'Assemblée nationale, Ministère des droits de la Personne humaine, des réformes institutionnelles, et des relations avec l'Assemblée nationale, Bujumbura, Burundi

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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 24 February 2001.