

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 16/05/97

UA 74/97

Arbitrary arrest / fear of torture / possible
prisoner of conscience

19 March 1997

BURUNDI Madame Solange NDIKUMANA (f), employee of the Ministry of Finance

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Madame Solange Ndikumana who was arrested in Bujumbura on 7 March 1997. She is being held at Mpimba prison, Bujumbura, after initially being taken to the *Documentation nationale*, national intelligence unit, where she was allegedly tortured.

Solange Ndikumana was arrested as she was leaving the country for Kenya. She has not been officially charged with any offence, although she is reported to have been accused of subversive activities. The basis for the allegation of subversion appears to be a letter she was carrying, in which the writer criticised the president, Pierre Buyoya, but not advocating violence.

Amnesty International believes Solange Ndikumana may be a prisoner of conscience, arrested because of her association with critics of the government.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Burundi has been in a state of civil war since the coup attempt of 21 October 1993. Since then, more than 150,000 people have been killed by security forces or armed groups from both Tutsi and Hutu communities. Since the coup in July 1996 which returned Major Pierre Buyoya to power, the conflict has continued and human rights violations by government security forces and Tutsi and Hutu armed groups have continued.

Although Major Pierre Buyoya promised to end human rights violations when he came to power, Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of extrajudicial execution, arbitrary arrest and torture. Critics and opponents of the government have been harassed detained or held under house arrest. More than 6,500 civilians, mostly Hutu, including at least 2,600 accused of involvement in massacres in Burundi, are held in various prisons and detention centres around the country. The majority are held without charge. Torture is reported to be carried out systematically, and with impunity, in detention centres belonging to the security forces. Deaths in custody are often reported.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Burundi authorities to investigate human rights violations, including extrajudicial execution, "disappearance", torture and ill-treatment and arbitrary arrest, committed by members of the Burundi security forces who continue to act with complete impunity.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes or faxes in French or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Solange Ndikumana, who was arrested on 7 March 1997, and is being held at Mpimba Central Prison;
- urging that reports that Solange Ndikumana was tortured at the *Documentation nationale* in Bujumbura be immediately investigated and, if confirmed, that those responsible be brought to justice in accordance with international standards for fair trial;
- urging that immediate steps be taken to guarantee her safety and humane treatment in custody;

- seeking clarification of the reasons for her arrest and continued detention; calling on the authorities to release her unconditionally if she is being held solely for her non-violent opinions;
- calling on the authorities to allow her immediate access to her family, legal counsel, medical care and representatives of humanitarian organisations.

NOTE: no mail is getting through to Burundi at present.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Gervais Rubashamiheto

Ministre de la Justice et Garde des sceaux

Fax: 257 22 2148

Telegrams: Ministre Rubashamiheto, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

Minister of Interior

Lieutenant-Colonel Epitace BAYAKANAKANDI

Ministre de l'Intérieur

Fax : + 257 222148 / 213055

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Intérieur, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

Procurator General

Monsieur Jean-Bosco BUTASI

Procureur Général

Fax: 257 222148

Monsieur le Procureur Général

COPIES TO:

President

Major Pierre Buyoya

Président de la République

Fax: 257 22 7490

Telegrams: Major Buyoya, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Président/Dear President

Minister for Human Rights

Madame Christine RUHAZA

Ministre des Droits de la Personne

Fax: + 257 216102

Telegrams: Ministre Ruhaza, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Madame le Ministre / Dear Minister

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 30 April 1997.