

UA 258/96

Fear of further deaths in custody

8 November 1996

RWANDA 16 detainees at Gitesi detention centre (dead)**Others held in overcrowded detention centres, especially in Kibuye préfecture**

Amnesty International is concerned that 16 detainees died as a result of life threatening conditions in a communal detention centre ("cachot") in Gitesi commune, Kibuye Préfecture during the night of 22-23 October 1996. The majority of prisoners in Rwanda are held, without charge or trial, in seriously overcrowded conditions in central prisons and communal detention centres. Amnesty International fears that further deaths in detention will occur unless immediate practical steps are taken by the local and national authorities to address this issue. Amnesty International is particularly concerned at conditions of detention in Kibuye Préfecture where there have been repeated cases of deaths of detainees, primarily as a result of overcrowding.

The 16 detainees, whose identities are not known to Amnesty International, had not been charged and were held in an extremely overcrowded cell with little ventilation. Guards outside the cell did not respond to the cries of the prisoners, reportedly because they feared that if they opened the door, the detainees would escape. The guards reportedly did not seek reinforcements to contain such an escape. The Préfet of Kibuye has stated that the authorities will take all possible steps to prevent further deaths in detention. It is not clear whether these will include an investigation, with a view to identifying responsibility, for these deaths in detention. The Préfet and other authorities had made similar statements following the deaths of 22 detainees in Kivumu commune, Kibuye in May 1996. However, little effective action appears to have been taken.

As large-scale arrests continue, and as communal detention centres continue to fill up, Amnesty International fears conditions will deteriorate further and more deaths will occur.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The prison population in Rwanda is now estimated at around 84,000. Most of the detainees have been arrested on the basis of their alleged participation in the genocide. However, Amnesty International considers many of these arrests to be arbitrary and based on little or no evidence. An increase in mass arrests in April 1996 - linked to the launch of an operation for the issue of identity cards - led to a marked deterioration in conditions in communal detention centres and central prisons, which were already filled to several times their capacity. Overcrowding in the communal detention centres is especially bad: detainees are no longer transferred to central prisons, as these are already full. Prison conditions are often life-threatening and amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

There is a high rate of arrests in Kibuye Préfecture, and conditions of detention are, as an immediate consequence, particularly harsh. There have been a number of deaths from overcrowding as well as from disease. There have also been cases of amputation also resulting from disease. A number of detainees are reported to have gone mad because of the conditions.

In May 1996 there were 2,800 prisoners in Kibuye central prison which was built for a maximum of 600. The prison opened in February 1995 and there have been

at least 28 deaths in the prison since then, mainly from dehydration, dysentery and other diseases.

Conditions of detention appear to be particularly life-threatening in Kivumu commune, Kibuye Préfecture. In May 1996, 22 detainees died at the communal detention centre in Kivumu. The authorities claimed that the deaths were caused by fighting which broke out amongst detainees. However, after visiting the detention centre and speaking to detainees who witnessed the deaths, Amnesty International believes the 22 detainees died as a result of lack of air and extreme heat in the grossly overcrowded cells. Prison guards refused to open the door, even though they heard detainees screaming for air and water. Several other detainees are reported to have suffocated to death in April in communal detention centres in other locations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French or English or your own language:

- deploring the deaths of 16 detainees at Gitesi detention centre, Kibuye, on 22-23 October 1996, and stating that these and previous deaths in detention could have been avoided;
- expressing deep concern at dehumanizing and life-threatening prison conditions suffered by detainees in Rwanda, drawing particular attention to conditions in Kibuye préfecture; state that these conditions constitute an extreme form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment;
- asking for immediate practical steps to be taken to address these conditions and to prevent further deaths in detention; ask to be kept informed of these steps;
- seeking assurances that prisoners suffering ill-health will be transferred to hospitals and provided with adequate medical care;
- calling for an investigation into all cases of death in detention and where prison officials or guards are found to be responsible they should be brought to justice in accordance with international standards of fairness;
- calling for measures to be taken to accelerate the process of examining the cases of detainees within a reasonable time, and for the release of those against whom there is insufficient evidence.

APPEALS TO:

Prefect of Kibuye

Monsieur Assiel KABERA

Préfet de Kibuye

Préfecture de Kibuye

BP 62, Kibuye, Rwanda

Fax: + 250 68004

Telegrams: Prefect, Kibuye, Rwanda

Salutation : Monsieur le Préfet

President

Président Pasteur Bizimungu

Présidence de la République

BP 15, Kigali, Rwanda

Fax: +250 84390

Telexes: 22502

Telegrams: President Bizimungu, Kigali, Rwanda

Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear President

Minister of Interior

Colonel Alexis Kanyarengwe
Vice-Premier Ministre et Ministre de l'Intérieur
BP 446, Kigali, Rwanda
Fax: +250 84373 / 83374
Telegrams: Ministre de l'Intérieur, Kigali, Rwanda
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

Minister of Justice
Faustin Nteziryayo
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
BP 160, Kigali, Rwanda
Fax: +250 85844 / 86509
Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice, Kigali, Rwanda
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Vice-President and Minister of Defence
Général Major Paul Kagame
Vice-Président de la République
et Ministre de la Défense
Présidence de la République
BP 15, Kigali, Rwanda
Fax: +250 72431 / 76969
Telegrams: Vice-Président Kagame, Kigali, Rwanda
Salutation: Monsieur le Vice-Président/Dear Vice-President

and to diplomatic representatives of Rwanda accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 December 1996.