

EXTERNAL

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Ill-treatment / Medical concern

23 December 1997

**RWANDA**      **Laurence Ntashamaje, peasant, in her 50s**

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There are fears for the well-being of Laurence Ntashamaje, who has suffered repeated ill-treatment in detention in Murambi *cachot* (local detention centre) in Rwanda's eastern *préfecture* of Umutara. She is currently believed to be in a very poor, possibly critical, state of health. The reason for her arrest is not known and she is not believed to have been formally charged.

Laurence Ntashamaje was a refugee in Tanzania between July 1994 and December 1996, when she returned to Rwanda. Soon after her return, she was reportedly beaten by a group of civilians in her home area of Murambi.

On her return Laurence had tried, unsuccessfully, to reclaim her house and land which had been occupied while she was in exile. She had subsequently been living with her children in makeshift housing.

In October 1997, she was summoned to the Gendarmerie at Murambi where she was reportedly beaten and placed in detention in Murambi *cachot*. About two weeks later, she was again summoned to the Gendarmerie and beaten. On 5 December, she was summoned a third time and reportedly beaten so severely that she lost consciousness and had to be taken to the local dispensary at Gakenke. She was returned to the detention centre on regaining consciousness.

Laurence Ntashamaje is thought to have developed several infections as a result of untreated wounds caused by the ill-treatment. Appalling conditions of detention, due to serious overcrowding, absence of basic hygiene and insufficient food and water are likely to aggravate her condition.

Laurence Ntashamaje is reported to have been denied visits from family and friends in recent weeks. A relative who visited her earlier in October reported that she had scars on her legs, believed to have been caused by beatings. Subsequently a visitor was allowed to leave food for her at the detention centre but was not allowed to see her.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

It is estimated that there are over 130,000 people currently detained in Rwanda on accusations of participation in the genocide, which claimed as many as one million lives in the country between April and July 1994. Trials began in December 1996. The vast majority of detainees have not yet been tried and many have not been formally charged.

While many of those detained in Rwanda are probably guilty of participation in the genocide in 1994, it is widely believed that many others are innocent. The accusation of "genocide" has also often been used to imprison individuals for other motives, for example in the context of property disputes.

Over the last three years a pattern of deliberate ill-treatment of detainees in the local detention centres, known as *cachots communaux*, has emerged. Reports of such ill-treatment have increased during 1997. Refugees who returned from Tanzania in December 1996 and from the former Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) in November 1996 appear to have been especially harshly treated. Those responsible include soldiers, gendarmes, and sometimes civilians in the presence of members of the security forces. Scores of deaths in detention as a result of deliberate ill-treatment have been reported during 1997.

In addition, hundreds of detainees are reported to have died in custody as a result of serious overcrowding and lack of basic hygiene and medical facilities. Most prisons and detention centres in Rwanda are filled to several times their capacity and in many cases the conditions amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In some cases, detainees appear to have been deliberately deprived of medical treatment. Detainees also suffer from a grossly inadequate supply of food. Those in the *cachots* are entirely dependent on their relatives to bring them food. In many cases, however, their families barely have enough to feed themselves.

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

- expressing deep concern at reports that Laurence Ntashamaje was repeatedly ill-treated while in detention in Murambi, Umutara, since October 1997, and that she is reported to be in very poor health;
- appealing for her to be granted immediate access to a doctor and for her to receive the necessary medical treatment;
- appealing for her to be allowed visits from her family;
- asking for an investigation into the reports of ill-treatment of Laurence Ntashamaje and for those found responsible for ordering and carrying out the ill-treatment to be suspended from their duties and to be brought to justice;
- asking for assurances that Laurence Ntashamaje will not be subjected to any further ill-treatment and that her well-being and safety will be guaranteed.

**APPEALS TO:**

Faustin NTEZILYAYO  
Ministre de la Justice  
Ministère de la Justice  
BP 160, Kigali, Rwanda

**Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Faxes: + 250 86509**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

M.Cheikh Abdul Karim HARELIMANA  
Ministre de l'Intérieur, du Développement communal et de la Réintégration sociale  
Ministère de l'Intérieur, du Développement communal de la Réintégration sociale  
BP 446, Kigali, Rwanda

**Telegrams: Ministre Intérieur, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Faxes: + 250 84373/83374/85714**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

Mme Aloysie INYUMBA  
Ministre de la Famille, de la Promotion féminine et des affaires sociales  
Ministère de la Famille, de la Promotion féminine et des affaires sociales  
BP 1413, Kigali, Rwanda

**Telegrams: Ministre Famille, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Faxes: + 250 77543**

**Salutation: Madame la Ministre / Dear Minister**

**COPIES 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 6 February 1998.