

PUBLIC

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UA 255/08 Arbitrary arrest

BURUNDI Jean-Claude Kavumbagu (m), journalist

Journalist Jean-Claude Kavumbagu was arrested on 11 September and charged with defamation. He alleged in an article that the cost of President Nkurunziza's trip to see the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics caused some civil servants' salaries to be paid late. He is held in Mpimba Central Prison, in the capital, Bujumbura. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

Burundi is a state party to both the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee the right to freedom of expression.

Jean-Claude Kavumbagu is the director of Burundian online press agency Net Press. The article alleged that the President had spent 100 million Burundian francs (about US\$90,000) on his 8 August trip to China. The lawyer acting on behalf of Jean-Claude Kavumbagu told the local press that the government claimed that the trip had only cost half that amount, and that Jean Claude Kavumbagu was responsible for "libellous writing and insulting remarks."

Article 72 of the Burundian Code of Criminal procedure states that the accused must be brought before a court within 15 days of an arrest warrant being issued. If found guilty, he could be sentenced to between six months and five years in prison, and a fine of between 100,000 and 300,000 Burundian francs (US\$90-260).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English, Kirundi or your own language:

- expressing grave concern that journalist Jean-Claude Kavumbagu has been detained on a charge of defamation, simply for criticising government expenditure;
- urging the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- reminding the authorities that Burundi is a state party to both the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee the right to freedom of expression.

APPEALS TO: (It may be difficult to get through to fax numbers in Burundi; please keep trying)

President

Président de la République Pierre Nkurunziza

Présidence de la République

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BP 1870

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Burundi

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Salutation: Monsieur le Président/Excellence

First Vice-president

Premier Vice-président Yves Sahinguvu
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Fax: +257 22 22 74 90

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Vice-président/Excellence

Second Vice-president

Deuxième Vice-président Mr Gabriel Ntisezerana
Présidence de la République
BP 1870
Bujumbura
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Fax: +257 22 22 74 90

Salutation: Monsieur le Deuxième Vice-président/Excellence

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

Ministre des Relations Extérieures et de la Coopération Mme Antoinette Batumubwira
Ministère des Relations Extérieures et de la Coopération
BP 6078
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Fax: +257 22 22 39 70

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Salutation: Madame la Ministre

Minister of Justice and Keeper of Seals

Monsieur Jean-Bosco Ndikumana
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux
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Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES 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 October 2008.