

EXTERNAL

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Arbitrary arrest / Fear of "disappearance" /
Fear of torture

20 March 1997

**BURUNDI Gertrude Riziki (f)
Chantal Hakizimana (f)
and five other women**

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Gertrude Riziki, Chantal Hakizimana and five other women, whose names are not known to Amnesty International, following their arrest on 14 March 1997 by members of the Burundi armed forces. The seven are reported to have been taken to a secret detention centre in the Kamenge district of Bujumbura, the capital, and have not been seen since. Amnesty International is concerned that the detainees, who appear to have been arbitrarily arrested, may be at risk of torture or "disappearance".

The women were travelling from Rural Bujumbura Province to the Kinama district of Bujumbura when they were arrested. The exact place of their arrest is not known but it is believed to be Kinama. According to reports, they were accused of having links with armed groups (*assaillants*), on the grounds they were travelling to Bujumbura from the provinces. They have not been charged with any offence. Many arrests are carried out by members of the armed forces although, according to legal procedures, they do not have powers of arrest.

Torture and ill-treatment of detainees is routine in Burundi and Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of "disappearance" or death in custody. Detainees are especially vulnerable to such abuses in cases such as these when legal procedures are not followed and safeguards protecting detainees, such as making the place of detention known, are not implemented or adhered to.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 15 March 1997, 35 people were extrajudicially executed in Bujumbura. While the identities of the majority of the victims are not known, one of the victims was identified as Eliezer, a young man who was arrested on 13 March and taken for questioning at the *Brigade spéciale de recherches* (BSR), Special Investigation Brigade, in Bujumbura. Amnesty International is concerned that the 34 other victims may also have been held at the BSR, and has called for an immediate investigation into the circumstances of the killings and for measures to be taken to prevent further unlawful killings. In November 1996, Amnesty International raised its concerns with the Burundi government over the "disappearance" of a number of prisoners from Muyinga prison, Muyinga Province in north eastern Burundi after they were taken from the prison by members of the security forces to be tried in their villages (see EXTRA 184/96, AFR 16/37/96, 29 November 1996). None have been seen since, although one of the prisoners' shoes were later found in a bush near the *brigade* (gendarmerie station). The organization has not received a response to its request to the Burundi government to immediately establish and make public the whereabouts of the detainees. 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.

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 the 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.

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

- expressing deep concern for the safety of Gertrude Riziki, Chantal Hakizimana and five others, who have not been seen since their arrest on 14 March by members of the Burundi armed forces;
- urging that the Burundi authorities urgently establish and make public the whereabouts of the detainees and take immediate steps to guarantee their safety;
- asking for information on the reasons for their arrest, and calling for them to be released immediately and unconditionally if they are not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling on the authorities to promptly investigate the incident and to bring to justice in accordance with international standards of fairness any officials who are found to have carried out or condoned human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest, and to take effective measures to prevent any such human rights violations in the future.

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 Defence

Lieutenant Colonel Firmin SINZOYIHEBA

Ministre de la Défense nationale

Fax: + 257 213 055

Telegrams: Ministre de la Défense, 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

COPIES TO:President

Major Pierre BUYOYA
Président de la République
Fax: 257 22 7490

Minister for Human Rights

Madame Christine RUHAZA
Ministre des Droits de la Personne
Fax: + 257 216102

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 1 May 1997.