

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 16/09/96

UA 114/96

Fear of "disappearance" / Fear of torture

1 May 1996

BURUNDI Richard NIYONGERE, journalist

Amnesty International fears for the physical safety of Richard Niyongere, a journalist working for the *Agence Burundaise de Presse* (ABP), Burundi Press Agency. He is reported to be in hiding after learning that he was being sought by government forces. The organization is concerned that he may be subjected to unlawful arrest, torture or ill-treatment and "disappearance".

The hunt for Richard Niyongere by government forces began after ABP published his report that members of the security forces were involved in the killing of 10 members of a family in Buyenzi suburb of the capital, Bujumbura. Foreign media, such as *Agence France Presse* (AFP) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), quoted the ABP report. Richard Niyongere, a former refugee in Rwanda, returned to Burundi in July 1994 when he started working for ABP.

A Burundi military spokesman reportedly told a BBC journalist that they were "actively" looking for Richard Niyongere. The spokesman reportedly denied that the security forces had killed anyone in Buyenzi. He claimed that the Gendarmerie had only shot in the air to disperse an angry crowd following a traffic accident, without injuring or killing anyone. There has been no independent confirmation of this.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Burundi has been in a state of civil war since 21 October 1993 when President Melchior Ndadaye, a Hutu, was killed by government soldiers during a coup attempt. Since then, more than 100,000 people have been killed by security forces or armed groups both Tutsi and Hutu.

About 5,600 people, most of them members of the majority Hutu ethnic group, are being held in a number of detention centres around Burundi. The detainees are accused of killing members of the minority Tutsi ethnic group and Hutu members of Tutsi-dominated political parties, and of belonging to exclusively Hutu or Hutu-dominated armed groups which have been fighting the Tutsi-dominated government forces. Most of the detainees are held without charge or trial.

The Tutsi-dominated judiciary has failed to investigate allegations by detainees that they have been tortured. In March 1995, Amnesty International delegates visiting Burundi interviewed two detainees who had been tortured (see UA 77/95, AFR 16/04/95, 27 March 1995). The delegates were informed that a top judicial official had authorized the use of violence to extract confessions. Torture is reported to be carried out systematically, and with impunity, in detention centres belonging to the security forces. Deaths in custody are also often reported.

Some government authorities, including the Prime Minister, recently advocated the setting up of self-defence units and called the young "not to hesitate to destroy people they would qualify as suspects". A prominent politician of the Tutsi-dominated *Uprona* party called for the "cleansing of the administration".

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

- expressing concern at reports that Burundi security forces are searching for Richard Niyongere because he reported the killings of 10 people in Buyenzi by armed men, some of whom appeared to be members of the security forces;
 - asking whether any warrant has been issued for his arrest and, if so, on what charges and which service has the authority to carry out the arrest;
 - seeking assurances that Richard Niyongere will not be subjected to arbitrary arrest or to any form of violence or torture,
- if possible, also:**
- point out that if he is arrested only because he reported killings in which members of the security forces appear to have been involved, Amnesty International would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience and demand his immediate and unconditional release.

APPEALS TO:

1. Minister of Defence

Lieutenant-Colonel Firmin SINZOYIHEBA
Ministre de la Défense Nationale
Ministère de la Défense Nationale
BP 1870
Bujumbura, République du Burundi

Faxes: +257 223959

Telegrams: Ministre de la Défense, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

2. Minister of Justice

Monsieur Gérard NGENDABANKA
Ministre de la Justice
et Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice
BP 1880, Bujumbura, République du Burundi

Faxes: +257 222148

Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

3. Minister of Communication

Monsieur Antoine BAZA
Ministre de la Communication
Ministère de la Communication
Bujumbura, République du Burundi

Faxes: +257 216318

Telegrams: Ministre de la Communication, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

1. Head of State

Son Excellence le Président Sylvestre NTIBANTUGANYA
Président de la République
Présidence de la République
BP 1870, Bujumbura, République du Burundi

Faxes: +257 227490

2. Prime Minister

Monsieur Antoine NDUWAYO
Premier Ministre

Présidence de la République
BP 2800, Bujumbura, République du Burundi
Faxes: +257 226424

3. Minister for Human Rights

Madame Marcienne MUJAHAWA

Ministre des Droits de la Personne Humaine, de l'Action Sociale et de la
Promotion de la Femme

Ministère des Droits de la Personne Humaine, de l'Action Sociale et de la
Promotion de la Femme

BP 2690, Bujumbura, République du Burundi

Faxes: +257 215179 or 233139

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 20 June 1996.