

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety / Fear of ill-treatment

2 September 1998

BURUNDI Mr Pascal Birari, local administrative advisor (*conseiller communal*) in Mutimbuzi commune, Rural Bujumbura Province and around 15 others, names unknown

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Pascal Birari who was arrested by soldiers on 30 August 1998 and around 15 other civilians who were arrested by soldiers on 25 August and who are reportedly detained at Kiyange military post. Fears for Pascal Birari are heightened by the fact that his place of detention is not known (though it is reported that he may be at either Gakumbu military camp or Gatumba police station (*brigade*), in Rural Bujumbura province). Torture and ill-treatment of detainees in military camps is routine in Burundi.

Pascal Birari was arrested by soldiers from the Maramvya and Rubirizi zones of Mutimbuzi commune who reportedly accused him of providing food and other support to armed opposition groups. The soldiers reportedly claimed that he had been denounced by those arrested five days earlier.

His arrest may have been connected to a public meeting he had organized the day before, under the authority of the administrator of the commune, in which the population of Kirekura *colline* (administrative unit) were encouraged to return to their homes - many of whom had fled the area following fighting between Hutu-dominated armed groups and the Burundian army. Although soldiers were not present in the area at the time of the meeting they are reported to have since moved in, causing people to flee again.

The approximately 15 inhabitants of Maramvya zone in Mutimbuzi commune, Rural Bujumbura, were arrested during an identity check. The 15 and about 85 others were taken to Maramvya zone military post but whilst the majority were released after four days and returned to their home areas by local officials, the 15 were transferred on to Kiyange military post.

Amnesty International is concerned that these arrests may be arbitrary and that those held are unlikely to be given an opportunity to challenge the basis for their arrest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

More than 8,000 civilians, mostly Hutu, are held in various prisons and detention centres around the country without charge or trial. Hundreds of these have been accused of participating in or collaborating with Hutu-dominated armed opposition groups although in many cases there is no substantiating evidence to support this and as such many of the arrests appear to be arbitrary. Many have been tortured and ill-treated to extract statements or information and many have been reported "disappeared", particularly those in military camps. Children as young as 12 years old have also been arbitrarily accused of collaboration with armed groups and unlawfully detained.

Despite a cease-fire which was supposed to come into force in mid-July 1998, conflict is continuing in Burundi, particularly in the eastern provinces of Rural Bujumbura, Bubanza, Makamba and Bururi. There are many reports of human rights abuses including extrajudicial executions from these areas.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please check with your post office whether postal services from your country are functioning to Burundi. Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes - and if you are able, express/airmail letters - in French or your own language:

- expressing concern for Pascal Birari whose whereabouts are unknown, and 15 others, reportedly detained at Kiyange military position, and seeking assurances that they will not be ill-treated in detention;
- calling for the whereabouts of Pascal Birari to be made public;
- calling on the authorities to allow them immediate and continued access to their families, legal counsel, medical care and representatives of humanitarian and human rights organizations for the duration of their detention;
- calling for the detainees to be immediately and unconditionally released unless they are to be promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence for which there is substantive evidence to support the accusations against them.

APPEALS TO (please note that fax tones are difficult to obtain at times):

President

Major Pierre Buyoya

Président de la République

Présidence de la République

Telegrams: Major Buyoya, Bujumbura, Burundi

Telexes: 5036PRESIBU

Faxes: + 257 22 74 90

Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear President

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Terence SINUNGURUZA

Ministre de la Justice et Garde des sceaux

Ministère de la Justice

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Bujumbura, Burundi

Faxes: + 257 22 21 48

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Lieutenant-Col. Alfred NKURUNZIZA

Ministre de la Défense Nationale

Ministère de la Défense Nationale

BP 1870 Bujumbura, Burundi

Telegrams: Ministre Défense, Bujumbura, Burundi

Telexes: 5146MDMBDI / 5049MDNBDI

Faxes: + 257 22 39 59 / 21 75 05

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Minister for Human Rights, Institutional Reform and Relations with the National Assembly

Monsieur Eugène NINDORERA

Ministre des droits de la Personne humaine, des réformes institutionnelles, et des relations avec l'Assemblée nationale, Bujumbura, Burundi

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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 14 October 1998.