

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 16/38/96

EXTRA 186/96

Ill-treatment / Fear for safety /
Possible prisoner of conscience

5 December 1996

**BURUNDI Laurence Rusuku (f), aged 35, a teacher at Rutegama secondary school,
Muramvya Province**

Laurence Rusuku, arrested without warrant on 14 November 1996 as she was leaving the Burundi Commercial Bank in Muramvya, Muramvya Province, is reported to have been beaten in custody. She is being held incommunicado at detention centre of the *Police de Sécurité Publique* (PSP), Public Security Police, in Muramvya, where she is feared to be at risk of further ill-treatment and torture.

Amnesty International believes Laurence Rusuku, who has not been charged with any offence, may be a prisoner of conscience detained solely on account of her being the wife of Basile Ntamazeze, who was the head of the local branch of the former ruling party, the *Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi* (FRODEBU), Front for Democracy in Burundi.

Laurence Rusuku has reportedly been beaten daily by members of the PSP seeking to extract information about her husband's whereabouts. She is reported to have been denied access to visitors and has not been seen since her arrest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 the security forces or armed groups from both Tutsi and Hutu communities. More than 6,500 civilians, mostly Hutu, including at least 2,600 accused of involvement in massacres, 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 also often reported.

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.

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. The United Nations have reported that about 10,000 people have been killed in politically-motivated violence since July 1996.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes (currently no post to Burundi) in French or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Laurence Rusuku, illegally arrested on 14 November 1996, and held incommunicado at PSP detention centre in Muramvya where she is reported to have been ill-treated;
- urging that reports that Laurence Rusuku has been regularly beaten during her detention be immediately investigated, and if found to be true, those responsible be brought to justice in accordance with international standards of fairness;
- seeking clarification of the reasons for her arrest and continued detention, stressing that she appears to be a prisoner of conscience;

- calling for her immediate and unconditional release if she is not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling on the authorities - if her detention is to continue - to take immediate steps to guarantee her safety, and to allow her immediate access to her family, legal counsel, medical care and representatives of humanitarian organizations.

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 Interior

Lieutenant-Colonel Epitace BAYAKANAKANDI

Ministre de l'Intérieur

Fax : + 257 222148 / 213055

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Intérieur Bayakanakandi, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

Procurator General

Monsieur Jean-Bosco BUTASI

Procureur Général

Fax: 257 - 222148

Telegrams: Procureur General, Bujumbura, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Procureur Général / Dear Procurator General

Governor of Muramvya Province

Monsieur Pierre KANA

Gouverneur de la Province de Muramvya

Telegrams: Gouverneur Province, Hotel de ville, Muramvya, Burundi

Salutation: Monsieur le Gouverneur

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 5 January 1996.