

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Burundi: Journalists subjected to constant attacks.**

Amnesty International condemns an armed attack on the home of a radio journalist which resulted in the death of his night watchman.

"The Burundian authorities should order an independent and impartial investigation into the attack and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice," the organization said.

In the early hours of 19 February 2003, shots were fired by unknown people at the house of Alexis Sinduhije, director of the independent Burundian radio station, *Radio publique africaine* killing his night watchman, Nzisabira.

"This appears to be a clear act of intimidation against Alexis Sinduhije himself and the *Radio publique africaine* which has spoken out on human rights violations and sensitive political issues, including corruption," Amnesty International said.

"Any intimidation of journalists by threats of or actual violence is an attack on the most fundamental of human rights - the right to life and the rights to freedom of association and expression," Amnesty International said.

The organization urges the Burundian authorities to consult urgently with journalists and human rights defenders in order to institute measures to protect them from human rights abuses.

### **Background**

Freedom of expression in Burundi is under constant attack and there is a well-established pattern of harassment, ill-treatment and intimidation of those working in the independent media.

In August 2002, *Radio publique africaine* broadcasts were temporarily suspended for alleged non payment of taxes, a move considered by independent observers contacted in Burundi by Amnesty International to have been solely motivated by a desire to undermine the radio's independent stance.

In May 2002, the then Minister of Defence barred the media from broadcasting interviews with representatives of armed political groups saying that journalists should "choose" between the "rebels" and government forces. The statement by the Minister of Defence was made after an interview with Agathon Rwasa, leader of an armed political group active around the capital was broadcast. The interview followed an alleged assassination attempt against Agathon Rwasa, widely believed to have been orchestrated by senior government representatives as well as senior members of the *Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi* (FRODEBU) political party.

In March 2002, a journalist with *Studio Ijambo*, an independent radio station, was questioned for several hours after covering a demonstration by a group opposed to government negotiations with armed political groups. A journalist from *Radio Bonasha*, another independent radio station, was ill-treated by police at the same demonstration.

Public Document

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