

EXTERNAL

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Fear for safety / Prisoner of conscience

17 June 1996

BURUNDI Gervais SINDATUMA, 30, former officer of the Burundi armed forces

Amnesty International has just learned that Gervais Sindatuma, a former Hutu officer in the Burundi army, is in detention in Bururi barracks. The organization believes he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely on account of his ethnic origin, and fears that he is at risk of torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution.

Gervais Sindatuma is one of the few Hutu to have been admitted to the Burundian military academy, the *Institut Supérieur des Cadres Militaires* (ISCAM) (the ethnic composition of Burundi's army, dominated by the Tutsi minority, has always been one of the key issues in the country). He entered ISCAM in 1989, after President Pierre Buyoya opened it up to some Hutus following the ethnic strife of Ntega and Marangara in August 1988. Gervais Sindatuma was set to become the first Hutu army officer to graduate from ISCAM, when the 21 October 1993 coup attempt which claimed the life of the first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, took place. Because of threats he received from Tutsi colleagues, Gervais Sindatuma was forced to leave the academy and take refuge.

When he attempted to return to ISCAM, he was dismissed from the army in spite of a contrary ruling by the martial court. He appealed in April 1996 but was arrested, without warrant, on 14 May.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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

In early 1995, a splinter group of the ruling *Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi* (FRODEBU), Front for Democracy in Burundi, frustrated by the negotiations which were stripping them of the power they had gained from the elections of 1993, created the *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD), National Council for the Defence of Democracy, and an armed wing, the *Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (FDD), Forces for the Defence of Democracy. This group is led by a former Hutu cabinet minister, Léonard Nyangoma, and seems to have an upper hand in the ongoing struggle in the country. As a consequence of this turn of events, some Tutsi members of the government called for the "surveillance and denunciation of enemies", these being understood as mainly the Hutu people. Gervais Sindatuma is a close relative of Léonard Nyangoma.

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

- calling for Gervais Sindatuma, arrested without warrant on 14 May 1996 and held since in Bururi barracks, to be released immediately and unconditionally as a prisoner of conscience, detained solely because of his Hutu ethnic origin;
- expressing concern for his safety and seeking assurances that he is being treated humanely in accordance with international standards for detention;
- noting that he should not be treated as a member of the armed forces as he was a civilian at the time of his arrest.

APPEALS TO:

Lieutenant-Colonel Firmin Sinzoyiheba
Ministre de la Défense Nationale
Ministère de la Défense Nationale
B.P. 20, Bujumbura, Burundi
Telegrams: Ministre de la Defense, Bujumbura, Burundi
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Lieutenant-Colonel Janvier BARIBWEGURE
Auditeur Militaire
Ministère de la Défense
B.P. 20, Bujumbura, Burundi
Telegrams: Auditeur Militaire, Minstere de la Defense, Bujumbura, Burundi
Salutation: Monsieur l'Auditeur / Dear Judge Baribwegure

COPIES TO:

1. Président Sylvestre Ntibantunganya
Présidence de la République
B.P. 1870
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: +257 22 7490

2. Antoine Nduwayo
Premier Ministre
Présidence de la République
B.P.1870
Bujumbura, Burundi

3. Gérard Ngendabanka
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
B.P. 1880
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: +257 22 2148

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 10 August 1996.