

UA 38/00

Death in detention / Torture and ill-treatment

15 February 2000

BURUNDI Scores of detainees including:
Lévi RUKONDO, School director
Nestor NIKOBAGOMBA
Canésius BARAKAMFITIYE, Adviser, Ministry of Foreign relations
Eliazard BANDYAMBONA
André BIGIRIMANA
André BAZIRINYAKAMWE, Employee, Ministry of Communal
Development
Pascal NYABENDA, farmer
Etienne BAYAMPUNDE, farmer
Diomède Buyoya, domestic worker (dead)

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of scores of people, including those named above, who are held at the *Brigade spéciale de Recherche* (BSR), Special Investigation Unit, in the capital Bujumbura.

Amnesty International has frequently raised concern for the safety of detainees at the BSR, a gendarmerie unit responsible to the Ministry of Defence. It is particularly concerned following the death at the BSR of Diomède Buyoya on 13 February 2000. He had been taken there by a soldier, whose wife employed Diomède Buyoya, the day before, after the soldier's wife accused Diomède Buyoya of insulting her. Witnesses who saw his body in a mortuary in the city said that his torso showed signs of torture and that his neck particularly was bruised and swollen.

All those named above, except for Diomède Buyoya and Etienne Bayampunde, are reportedly accused of having links with armed opposition groups active in the area. The basis of the accusations is not known. The reason for Etienne Bayampundes detention is not known. People accused of links with armed opposition groups are particularly vulnerable to torture and at least two of those named above are reported to have been tortured.

Lévi Rukondo, who was arrested on 30 November 1999 and is apparently accused of having given money to a deserter from an armed opposition group, is reported to have been severely beaten in military custody in a military barracks, Camp Buyenzi in Bujumbura. The basis for the allegation is not known and he has not been formally charged. After his arrest, he was reportedly detained in several places. As his whereabouts were unknown for some time, this gave rise to fears that he had "disappeared". Canésius Barakamfitiye is also reported to have scars which may be the result of torture.

Scores of other people are reportedly being detained in military barracks around Bujumbura, on the basis of similar accusations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Reports of torture and "disappearances" increased at the end of 1999 when scores of people were arrested. Detainees are often moved from one place of detention to another, including from military to civilian detention, without documentation about where they may be held. Torture and ill-treatment of detainees, particularly those in police and military custody, is routine and usually takes place in the initial days and weeks of detention. Statements extracted through torture or intimidation have been accepted as evidence in court. In some cases it may be the only evidence against the defendant.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in French or your own language (Please check whether postal services to Burundi are operating from your country):

- expressing grave concern for the safety of scores of people in military detention in Bujumbura, particularly the BSR, after reports of systematic torture and ill-treatment;
- expressing concern at the death of Diomède Buyoya at the BSR on 13 February 2000 and the reported torture of Lévi Rukondo and Canésius Barakamfitiye;
- demanding a full and independent investigation into the death of Diomède Buyoya and into reports of torture at the BSR and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for immediate steps to be taken to protect detainees held at the BSR, mentioning those named above, and asking that they be granted access to their families, medical care, and humanitarian and human rights organizations;
- calling for the accusations against detainees at the BSR to be promptly investigated and asking for their release if they are not to be charged on the basis of substantiated evidence;
- calling for proper registration of all detainees in military and civilian custody.