

URGENT ACTION

DEFENDER ACCUSED OF UNDERMINING STATE SECURITY

Nestor Nibitanga, a former member of the deregistered Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (APRODH), was arrested in Gitega on 21 November. Burundian police have accused him of undermining state security.

Prior to the organization's closure, **Nestor Nibitanga** was the regional observer responsible for the Centre and East of Burundi for the Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (Association pour la Protection des Droits Humains et des Personnes Détenues, APRODH). In October 2016, authorities deregistered APRODH, one of the best-known Burundian human rights organizations, ordering its permanent closure.

Police arrested Nestor Nibitanga on the morning of 21 November at his home in the Musinzira neighbourhood of Gitega. His wife reported that under the command of the provincial police commissioner and the head of the National Intelligence Service (SNR) in Gitega province, police surrounded them and then searched the house before arresting Nestor Nibitanga. He was later moved to the capital Bujumbura where he is being held by the SNR and is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment in custody.

Burundian police confirmed that they had arrested Nestor Nibitanga at his home in Gitega for undermining state security. They added that they had seized several documents as evidence. There are concerns that this incident may be in retaliation for his legitimate human rights activities.

Please write immediately in French, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to release Nestor Nibitanga unless he is promptly charged with a recognizable criminal offence that does not stem from his activities as a human rights defender;
- Urging them to ensure that he is protected from torture or other ill-treatment while detained;
- Calling on them to ensure that he has access to his family members and a lawyer of his choosing, pending his release;
- Urging the authorities to stop harassing human rights defenders and to recognise the legitimacy of their activities.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 JANUARY 2018 TO:

Minister of Public Security

Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni
Ministère de la Sécurité Publique
Avenue Nyabisindu
Ngagara, Quartier Industriel
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: +257 22 22 90 90
Email: infos@securitepublique.gov.bi
Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

Aimée Laurentine Kanyana
Ministry of Justice
BP 1305
Bujumbura, Burundi
Email: info@justice.gov.bi
Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of the Interior and Patriotic Training

Pascal Barandagiye
Ministry of the Interior and Patriotic Training
BP 1910
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: +257 22 24 53 51
Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Ms Clotilde Ntahitangira *Charge d'Affaires a.i.*, Embassy of the Republic of Burundi, Uganda House Second Floor 58-59 Trafalgar Square WC2N 5DX, 020 7930 4958, Fax 020 7930 4957, www.burundiembassy.org.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Human rights defenders in Burundi have come under sustained attack since the beginning of the crisis in April 2015. Many journalists and human rights defenders have been forced to flee the country and for those that remain, their work has become more difficult and dangerous, with increased surveillance and the threat of reprisals. APRODH's founder and president, Pierre-Claver Mbonimpa, narrowly survived an attempt on his life in August 2015. His son and son-in-law were killed in November and October 2015 respectively.

Germain Rukuki, president of Njabutsa Tujane, an employee of the Burundian Catholic Lawyers Association and a former member of ACAT-Burundi (Christian Action Against Torture), was arrested in Bujumbura on 13 July 2017 and his wife's computer seized. ACAT-Burundi was shut down in October 2016 at the same time as APRODH. Germain Rukuki was held and interrogated by the SNR without a lawyer present, before being transferred to Ngozi prison on 26 July. On 1 August he was formally accused of "undermining state security" and "rebellion", based on his activities with ACAT-Burundi. The public prosecutor presented an email exchange dating from a period when ACAT-Burundi was still legally registered in Burundi as evidence against him. Germain Rukuki has been denied bail.

On 19 October 2016, the Minister of Interior and Patriotic Training, Pascal Barandagiye, ordered the permanent closure of five of Burundi's leading human rights organizations, including APRODH and ACAT-Burundi. He accused them of working to tarnish the image of the country and sow hatred and division among the Burundian population. The organizations had all been named in the August 2015 report of a commission of inquiry instituted by the Burundian Prosecutor General to look into the "insurrectional movement that began on 26 April 2015", as the campaign against President Nkurunziza's third term, which civil society participated in, has been characterised by the government.

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