

SOS-TORTURE/BURUNDI REPORT NO. 285 PUBLISHED ON MAY 29, 2021

This report by SOS-Torture/Burundi covers the period from May 22nd to 29th, 2021 regarding cases of human rights violations in Burundi.

At least seventeen (17) persons were murdered during this period in different localities of the country, including seven (7) victims who perished in grenade explosions in some bus parks in the city of Bujumbura.

This report also deplores eighty-five (85) persons seriously injured in grenade attacks in the towns of Bujumbura and Muramvya, fifteen (15) cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, and one (1) case of kidnapping in Mukike commune.

1. Violations of the right to life

- In the afternoon of Saturday, May 22, 2021, around 5:00 p.m., the lifeless body of an unidentified man was discovered by fishermen on the 4th cross-road of Nyamitanga hill, Buganda commune, in the province of Cibitoke (northwestern Burundi), less than 50 meters from the Rusizi river, bordering the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo).

Witnesses to the gruesome discovery revealed that the victim's body had numerous wounds and a rope around his neck, suggesting that he had been killed by strangulation, after having been subjected to torture.

The same source specifies that the fishermen quickly alerted soldiers from a barracks of the 3rd cross-road in Nyamitanga who came in the company of the communal administrator of Buganda, Pamphile Hakizimana, who immediately gave the order to bury the body without an investigation having been opened to determine the perpetrators and the motive for the crime.

SOS-Torture/Burundi deplores the fact that lifeless bodies of peaceful citizens continue to be discovered in or along Rusizi river in the complete silence of the country's authorities and without any investigation being carried out to establish responsibility and thus curb this recurring criminal phenomenon in this part of the national territory.

- On the morning of Sunday, May 23, 2021, at approximately 11:00 a.m., gold miners returning from their mining site on Ruseseka hill, Buhoro zone, Mabayi commune, Cibitoke province (northwestern Burundi) saw, near Nyamagana river, the lifeless body of Pascasie Mpawenimana, a 35 years widow and mother of five children. The body of the victim, naked, showed traces of blows to the head and forehead, suggesting that she had been raped by her torturers before being killed to avoid any further denunciation.

According to sources on the spot, the victim had left her home on Saturday, May 22, 2021, around 5:00 p.m. to fetch cassava flour and her children waited in vain for her return. According to the same sources, this widow had been seen in the company of three persons in a bistro in the centre of Ruseseka.

SOS-Torture/Burundi has learned that the three persons with whom the victim had shared a drink have been arrested by the police as part of the investigations.

- On the night of Sunday, May 23, 2021, soldiers from Nyamitanga barracks on patrol along Rusizi river, on the 5th cross-road of Nyamitanga hill, Buganda commune, Cibitoke province (northwestern Burundi) shot and killed an Imbonerakure known as Fabien Niyokwizera as he and others were attempting to cross the river towards the DRC with a bag of "Ndagala" fish and a box of "Mukeke" fish.

According to sources in this locality, the soldiers had been informed of the existence of a group of suspicious persons in this area and carried out a patrol during which they actually saw people in this river whom they shot after mistaking them for enemies.

- On the morning of Monday, May 24, 2021, a lifeless body of a man identified as Jean Mbarubukeye, aged about sixty years, was discovered floating on Lake Cohoha, at the foot of Muramba hill, Kirundo zone, commune and province (northern Burundi).

Sources on the spot say that the victim, a member of CNL (National Congress for Liberty) party, was killed with a machete by unidentified persons on the night of Sunday, May 23, 2021, and that the body was thrown into the lake to throw off the investigation.

SOS-Torture/Burundi has learned that the victim's body was buried the same day on the orders of Kirundo communal administrator without any investigation having been opened to identify the perpetrators and the motive for the crime.

- On the evening of Tuesday, May 25, 2021, between 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., four simultaneous grenade attacks were carried out in the main bus parking lots in Bujumbura town hall, killing at least seven people and injuring more than 80 others, some of whom were critically ill.

According to corroborating sources, the first attack targeted the bus parking lot at Ngagara market, commonly known as "Cotebu," and resulted in the death of four persons, including the person who allegedly threw the grenade, who was shot by the police, and in several injuries. Other similar and almost simultaneous attacks were perpetrated at the bus park serving the south of the town hall, at the bus park serving the north of the capital (at the alley commonly called "Plaza" in front of the stalls of vegetable sellers) and at the bus park called "Permanence" (on chaussée du peuple Murundi, near the Bwiza zone).

The same sources specify that the majority of the injured people were taken care of at the Prince Regent Charles Hospital located in Buyenzi zone (center of the city).

SOS-Torture/Burundi deploras attacks on peaceful citizens and joins the victims and their families who are in pain and desolation as a result of these senseless attacks against civilians. It calls on the government to open an independent and impartial investigation to determine the perpetrators and motives for these crimes and to refrain from making arbitrary arrests of certain categories of people who are already in its sights.

- On the morning of Wednesday, May 26, 2021, a half-decapitated lifeless body of a 9 years child known as Jean Claude Uwizeyimana was discovered by passersby in a small bush on Nyamikenke hill, Kigina zone, Bugabira commune, Kirundo province, just a few meters from the residence of his parents.

According to local sources, the young boy was a student in the second year of basic school and had disappeared on Tuesday morning, May 25, around 9:00 a.m.

The same sources specify that the motives and perpetrators of the crime are not yet known, but that conflicts between families would be at the origin of this assassination.

SOS-Torture/Burundi has learned that six people from the victim's neighborhood have been apprehended as part of an investigation opened by the police.

- On May 25, 2021, two lifeless bodies were discovered in the Kibira natural reserve; on the side of Gafumbegeti hill, Butahana area, in the commune of Mabayi while

lifeless body of a second victim was found on Kamenge hill in the Ruhororo area of the same commune.

- On May 26, 2021, three (3) decomposing lifeless bodies were discovered in the Kibira forest on the side of Ruhembe hill, Bumba zone, in the Bukinyana commune of Cibitoke province.

Persons who witnessed these were unable to identify any of those victims, but they say that all the bodies found had bullet wounds.

SOS Torture Burundi deplores a culture of trivialization of human life that seems to take root in Burundi and condemns the lack of willingness to conduct independent investigations that comforts the perpetrators to the great detriment of the victims and their relatives.

2. Violations of the right to physical integrity

- On the night of Thursday, May 27, 2021, around 9:00 p.m., an unidentified individual threw a grenade into a bistro located near the central market of Muramvya (central Burundi) and belonging to a certain Peter.

According to local sources, the explosion of this grenade injured five persons, some of whom were evacuated to the hospital in Muramvya and others to hospitals in the city of Bujumbura.

The same sources reveal that this grenade was thrown just 10 minutes after the power cut in the town of Muramvya.

SOS-Torture/Burundi has learned that the police arrested ten (10) suspects during the same night who are being held in the dungeons of the provincial police station in Muramvya.

The organization urges Police to lucidity in the investigations so that no innocent person is unjustly detained and that the perpetrators be held accountable for their crimes, call for prior investigation since it is hardly conceivable that ten people could collectively throw a single grenade.

3. Violations of the right to liberty: arbitrary arrests and detentions

- On the night of Saturday, May 22, 2021, around 10:00 p.m., the communal police commissioner in Ndava and the provincial police commissioner in Mwaro arbitrarily

arrested at his home Dédith Niyongere, head of Fota hill and a teacher at Muramba Basic School in the same commune.

According to sources on the spot, these police authorities entered the victim's home while he was sleeping and ordered him to board their vehicle bound for the dungeon of the provincial police station of Mwaro without any information on the motive for his arrest being provided.

SOS-Torture/Burundi denounces the repetitive violations of the rules of the code of criminal procedure, more particularly those relating to arrests and detentions by law enforcement officers, which have become a habit and recalls that home visits and searches are well regulated in the code of criminal procedure in force in Burundi. In fact, in addition to the fact that officers or agents of the judicial police can only enter the homes of individuals if they have a search warrant duly signed by the competent authority (art. 123), visits and searches cannot take place before six o'clock in the morning and after six o'clock in the evening (art. 126).

- On the morning of Sunday, May 23, 2021, on Kinyami hill, Giteranyi commune, Muyinga province (northeastern Burundi), police officers arrested four members of the CNL party as they were on their way to an activity organized at the party's headquarters and detained them in the dungeon of the Giteranyi communal police station. They are Jean Marie Muhigirwa, Jean Nzitunga, Alexis Rwaswa and the head of the hill named Radjabu Ndaruvunikiye.

Sources on the ground reveal that this arrest follows an attack carried out on the night of Saturday, May 22, 2021 against the property of the leader of CNDD-FDD (National Council for the Defense of Democracy - Forces for the Defense of Democracy) party on Kinyami hill, where banana and coffee fields were vandalized, and that the suspicions have therefore been placed on members of CNL, without any material evidence.

The same sources state, however, that the chief of the hill was released the next day on the decision of the communal police commissioner in Giteranyi, after having been questioned.

SOS-Torture/Burundi condemns the arbitrary arrests on a background of political intolerance against any person opposed or suspected of being opposed to the current regime and invites the government to promote the culture of tolerance, justice and social peace among all the components of the Burundian nation.

4. Abduction cases

- On the night of Saturday, May 22, 2021, around 11:00 p.m., police officers from the 3rd GMIR (Mobile Rapid Response Unit) at Nyabisaka station abducted Egide Nizigiyimana from his home located at the sub-hill of Sobobo, Ruzibazi hill, Mukike commune, in Bujumbura province.

Sources on the ground reveal that Egide Nizigiyimana, a farmer and cow trader, is allegedly accused of having participated in the 2015 demonstrations against President Pierre Nkurunziza's illegal third term and was taken to an unknown destination in a jeep belonging to the infamous commissioner Désiré Uwamahoro.

SOS-Torture/Burundi fears that the abduction of Egide Nizigiyimana could turn into an enforced disappearance, given that OPC1 Désiré Uwamahoro is cited in several reports by national and international human rights organizations as the author of several cases of abductions followed by enforced disappearances, assassinations and other similar evils.

SOS-Torture/Burundi was initiated with the objective of informing national and international opinion on serious human rights violations taking place in Burundi through monitoring reports, particularly on torture, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, sexual violence and summary executions.

This initiative to inform on the realities of the country followed the carnage of a hundred people killed during the day of December 11 and 12, 2015 by the police and military under the pretext of pursuing rebels who had just attacked military camps located on the outskirts of the capital.

The affected zones are said to be contesting the third term of President Nkurunziza, namely Musaga, Mutakura, Cibitoke, Nyakabiga, Jabe, the last two being located in the center of the Bujumbura City Hall.