

SOS-TORTURE/BURUNDI REPORT NO. 286 PUBLISHED ON 5 JUNE 2021

This report by SOS-Torture/Burundi covers the period from 29 May to 5 June 2021 regarding cases of human rights violations in Burundi.

At least seventeen eight (8) people were murdered during this period in different localities of the country.

This report also deplores six (6) people seriously injured, one (1) person victim of arbitrary arrest and detention, and two (2) cases of abduction in different localities of the country.

1. Violations of the right to life

- On the night of Monday 31 May 2021, on Gasesa sub-hill, Nyamakarabo hill and zone, Mugina commune, in Cibitoke province (north-western Burundi), a man known as Lazare Sakubu (65 years old) was murdered and beheaded by unidentified persons.

According to local sources, Lazare Sakubu had left his home in the evening at around 6 p.m. to a bistro located about 100 miles from his home and his family waited in vain for him to return.

The same sources reveal that the victim was killed for reasons linked to witchcraft and that he had received death threats for some time.

SOS-Torture/Burundi deplores the silence of the administrative and judicial authorities in the face of targeted killings linked to witchcraft, when it is easy to investigate and discover the authors of these threats in order to bring them to justice and thus discourage this phenomenon, which is particularly recurrent in this region of the country.

- On the afternoon of Tuesday June 1st, 2021, farmers returning from their farming activities discovered a woman's decomposing body in a cassava field on the Migezi sub-hill of the Rugajo hill and zone, Mugina commune, in Cibitoke province.

According to witnesses of the macabre discovery, the victim's body was naked, which makes them think that he had been raped before he was shot.

- On the night of Tuesday 1 June 2021, unidentified individuals shot and killed Célestin Bigirimana at his home on Bihinde hill, Bugarama commune, in Rumonge province (southwestern Burundi).

According to local sources, Célestin Bigirimana, a teacher at the Bambo Basic School, married and father of four children, was murdered by Imbonerakure for political reasons because of his new membership of the CNL party, after leaving the CNDD-FDD, of which he had been a long-time activist.

SOS-Torture/Burundi calls on the Government of Burundi to disarm the Imbonerakure by withdrawing all the weapons it has distributed to them and to effectively reintegrate them into civilian life, given that, since their so-called demobilization, they have always been superimposed on official security structures.

- On the night of Monday to Tuesday, 1 June 2021, at around midnight, two people, including a woman in her sixties and her grandson, were killed and another was injured in a grenade explosion on Ruzingati hill, in Gahombo commune of Kayanza province (northern Burundi).

According to local witnesses, as yet unidentified criminals detonated a grenade thrown through the window into the room where an elderly couple and their grandson were sleeping. The child and his grandmother died immediately, while the chief of the family was seriously injured.

The same sources reveal that the motives for this despicable act are linked to suspicions of witchcraft.

SOS-Torture/Burundi calls on the police and judicial authorities for investigations each time allegations of witchcraft are made in a community in order to prevent those murders, instead of remaining silent or promising investigations that never lead to results. Indeed, it has already been shown that heinous crimes based on superstitious allegations throughout the country have always been preceded by death threats against the victims, although administrative authorities have sometimes been informed, but without taking any action to protect the victims.

- In the afternoon of Thursday 3 June 2021 at around 3 p.m., shepherds discovered the lifeless body of an unidentified man on the 5th transversal of the Ndava in Buganda commune, in the province of Cibitoke, about fifty miles from the Rusizi river separating Burundi from the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo).

According to those witnesses, the bound body of the victim had head injuries and was buried on the spot the same day on the orders of the Buganda communal administrator. The same sources specify that the place where bodies are regularly discovered is very close to a military standpoint, hence the concerns of the population of the locality about the perpetrators of these killings and they think that the military are the authors or accomplices.

- In the afternoon of Thursday 3 June 2021, at around 4 p.m., two lifeless bodies of two children aged around 7 and 13 years were discovered floating on the waters of Lake Tanganyika, not far from the East African Hotel located in the chief town of Nyanza-Lac, in the province of Makamba (southern Burundi).

According to witnesses, the bodies of these unidentified children were taken to the morgue of the Nyanza-Lac hospital pending their identification and the motives for these deaths are not yet known.

2. Violations of the right to physical integrity

- On the night of Thursday 3 June 2021, Imbonerakure on patrol on Mihigo hill, in Busiga commune of Ngozi province (northern Burundi) wounded an activist of the CNL (National Congress for Liberty) party known as Emmanuel Nyandwi, aged 43.

According to witnesses, Emmanuel was returning from a bistro where he had spent the evening sharing a drink with friends when he came across Imbonerakure who beat him several times.

The same sources claim that this CNL activist had been threatened for several days by the Imbonerakure who had sworn to "correct" him for refusing to join their party.

SOS-Torture/Burundi deplores the political intolerance of CNDD-FDD members towards other opposition parties because they benefit from total impunity for the abuses they constantly commit in full view of the country's authorities.

- On the night of Wednesday 2 June 2021, an old woman in her sixties was seriously burnt when her house was set on fire by unidentified criminals on Rusunu hill, in the zone, commune and province of Rutana (south-east Burundi) and was taken to Rutana hospital where she was admitted for intensive care.

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

- On 1 June 2021, SNR agents arrested Alexis Hamenyimana, a native of the Maramvya zone of the Burambi commune, in the province of Rumonge (south-western Burundi), and took him directly to the SNR's dungeon in Rumonge before transferring him to the police cells in the same province the following day.

Sources close to the victim indicate that he had gone to the Public Prosecutor's Office in Rumonge as a witness for a resident prosecuted in the case of armed attacks perpetrated in the Maramvya zone, but also to clarify several death threats he had received for some time.

The same sources state that because of his security concerns, Alexis Hamenyimana had decided to send a letter to the provincial authorities, a copy of which was sent to the provincial police, the prosecutor's office and the National Intelligence Service in Rumonge.

SOS-Torture/Burundi recalls that the Burundian justice system is held hostage by administrative and security officials who dictate the decisions to be taken, which is one of the causes of the impunity that plagues this institution, which is independent in name only.

4. Abduction cases

- On the morning of Wednesday 2 June 2021, agents of the SNR (National Intelligence Service) abducted a retired policeman known as Ernest Bagayuwitunze (55) on suspicion of collaboration with armed groups based in the highlands of South Kivu, eastern DRC.

According to eyewitnesses, these agents broke into the bedroom, directly brutalized and tied up the victim, without a warrant or any explanation of the reason for his arrest, and took him to an unknown destination in their car.

The same sources reveal that the team that abducted the victim was led by OPC1 Alexis Ndayikengurukiye, alias Nkoroka, in the company of a local Imbonerakure, nicknamed Nyika, who played the role of accomplice.

SOS-Torture/Burundi fears that the abduction of Ernest Bagayuwitunze, a native of Buganda commune could turn into an enforced disappearance because of the bad record of the kidnapper, who has been cited in several reports of Burundian civil society organisations and the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi.

- In the afternoon of Thursday 3 June 2021, agents of the National Intelligence Service (SNR), including the infamous Mathias Nduwimana, nicknamed Athia, abducted a young man called Thierry Kwizera, a resident of the Kinanira I, Musaga zone, Muha commune, in the Bujumbura town.

According to local witnesses, Thierry Kwizera was arrested when he was inside a supermarket known as IDEAL, located near the location called BATA, in the centre of Bujumbura city and was taken away in a white van with tinted windows and registration number D3981A, to an unknown destination. He had recently been released under a presidential grace, after 5 years of detention in the central prison of Mpimba.

SOS-Torture/Burundi condemns the recurrent cases of forced disappearances of former prisoners benefiting from the presidential grace, a measure that could be interpreted as a new tactic of the CNDD-FDD system to make any person opposed or suspected of being opposed to the current government disappear. We call on the Head of State, Evariste Ndayishimiye, who took this measure, to protect those citizens and do everything possible to stop this phenomenon of enforced disappearances and to identify the perpetrators.

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.