

SOS-TORTURE BURUNDI REPORT NO. 436 PUBLISHED ON 21 APRIL 2024

This report by SOS-Torture Burundi covers the period from 13 to 20 April 2024 concerning cases of human rights violations in Burundi.

During this period, at least four (4) people were arbitrarily arrested in various parts of the country.

The report also deplores the case of four (4) people who were abducted by police officers and agents of the National Intelligence Service (SNR) in Bujumbura province, Bubanza, Kayanza and in the province of Ruyigi.

1. Violations of the right to freedom of movement: arbitrary arrest and detention

- On the afternoon of Saturday 13 April 2024, at around 1 p.m., Sandra Muhoza, a correspondent for the online newspaper "La Nova-Burundi" (a former correspondent for Bonesha FM radio and a former journalist for a local radio station, Ntumbero, which had closed down), was arbitrarily arrested by agents of the National Intelligence Service (SNR) and taken to an unknown destination.

According to sources in her department, Sandra Muhoza responded to a call from a shopkeeper close to the CNDD-FDD¹ and known in the locality as Marc Maniralkiza alias Pochen for an alleged conversation with him about avocado cultivation. The same sources believe that the victim spent Saturday night under torture in a cell at the Judicial Police station in Ngozi (northern Burundi) before being transferred on Monday 15 April to a cell at SNR headquarters in Bujumbura.

SOS-Torture Burundi has learned that journalist Sandra Muhoza was transferred on the evening of Thursday 18 April to Bujumbura's central prison, commonly known as "Mpimba Prison", after being placed under arrest warrant on the basis of

¹ Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie.

exchanges and comments she made in a WhatsApp group called "Burundi Médias", which mainly brings together journalists and other communicators close to the government. The journalist is a victim of the comments she made in this group in connection with news of the alleged distribution of machetes to the Imbonerakure (members of the youth league affiliated to the CNDD-FDD) in certain parts of the country.

SOS-Torture Burundi denounces the widespread practice in Burundi of arbitrary arrests in the form of kidnappings and calls on the government to act appropriately to put an end to this practice and to give pride of place to respect for the legal provisions enshrined in the code of criminal procedure in force. It also deplores the monopolisation of freedoms in Burundi, where the government inquisition penetrates even small groups with no obvious interest for the ruling power, with the aim of muzzling any dissenting voice.

It is calling for the release of journalist Sandra Muhoza, given that the comments for which she is being prosecuted should not have been made outside the context in which they were made, namely in a simple WhatsApp group.

- In the early hours of Wednesday 17 April 2024, at around 5 a.m., retired police colonel Désiré Ntaraka and his wife were arrested by police officers and SNR agents at their home in the Gisovu district, in the capital of Bubanza province (western Burundi), and were taken directly to the SNR's Bujumbura dungeon.

According to local sources, police colonel Désiré Ntaraka and his wife were released at around 3 p.m. on the same day after being questioned about the true identity of their eldest son Bertrand Ntaraka, who has been held in Bujumbura central prison since last Thursday, 11 April, after being arbitrarily detained for a week in the SNR dungeon on suspicion of possessing Rwandan nationality. He was arrested while driving a vehicle belonging to a Congolese national from the Banyamulenge community.

2. Cases of abduction or enforced disappearance

- According to information received by SOS-Torture Burundi, Vianney Bigirimana (aged 31), an activist of the pro-Agathon Rwasa CNL (National Congress for Freedom) party, was abducted by men in police uniform on 15th avenue in the Maramvya of the Mutimbuzi commune, in Bujumbura province (western Burundi) at around 10 p.m. on the night of Thursday 11 April 2024. He was taken away in a white Toyota Hilux double-cabin van with tinted windows to an unknown destination.

According to local sources, members of the family of Vianney Bigirimana, a shopkeeper from the sub-hill of Kinyinya (Gitaramuka hill), in the commune of Nyabihanga of the Mwaro province (central Burundi), searched for him unsuccessfully in the various dungeons.

- Since the afternoon of Monday 15 April 2024, at around 3 p.m., a man known as Vital Nduhiye, who lives on Musenga hill in the centre of Ruyigi province (eastern Burundi), has been nowhere to be found and cannot be contacted by telephone.

According to family sources, Vital Nduhiye left his home to attend an appointment after receiving a call from someone asking him to meet him at the Rumuri car park in order to take him to someone who would give him a job.

The same sources stated that Vital Nduhiye has not returned to his family and that even his telephone remains switched off.

- On the afternoon of Monday 15 April 2024, at around 6 p.m., a young Imbonerakure known as Malachie Niyonkuru (aged 26), was abducted by police officers who found him at his home on the Nyakarambo sub-hill on the Gasare hill, in the commune of Matongo of the Kayanza province (northern Burundi) and took him to an unknown destination.

According to local sources, the motive for the arrest of Malachie Niyonkuru, who is married with one child, was not communicated to his family members, who searched for him the following day in various dungeons, without success.

- On the night of Wednesday 17 April 2024, at around 8 p.m., Guillaume Gahungu, a teacher and sports supervisor at the Burundi Agricultural Technical Institute (ITABU) in Gihanga in the province of Bubanza (north-west Burundi), was abducted by unidentified individuals and has since been taken to an unknown destination.

According to local sources, Guillaume Gahungu was in a refreshment bar in the centre of Gihanga when he received a call from a stranger asking him to meet him on National Road N°5 (NR5). Since that day, members of his family have searched for him in all the dungeons, but to no avail.

SOS-Torture/Burundi was initiated with the aim of informing national and international opinion about the serious human rights violations taking place in Burundi through monitoring reports 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 11 December and 12 December 2015 by police and military under the pretext of pursuing rebels who had just attacked military camps on the outskirts of the capital.

The affected areas are said to be contesting the third term of President Nkurunziza, namely Musaga, Mutakura, Cibitoke, Nyakabiga and Jabe, the last two being located in the centre of Bujumbura city.