

SOS-TORTURE BURUNDI REPORT NO. 438 PUBLISHED ON 5 MAY 2024

This report by SOS-Torture Burundi covers the period from 27 April to 4 May 2024 concerning cases of human rights violations in Burundi.

During this period, at least two (2) people were murdered in the provinces of Cibitoke and Gitega.

The report also deplores the case of three (3) people from the same family abducted the same day and reported missing since 18 April 2024 in Bujumbura city.

1. Violations of the right to life

- On the night of Saturday 27 April 2024, at around 10 p.m., a man known as Antoine Nizigiyimana, aged 62, was murdered with machetes by unidentified individuals on the Mabuye sub-hill of the Butaramuka hill, in the commune of Mugina of the Cibitoke province (north-west Burundi). He had spent the evening sharing a drink with neighbours in a local bar.

According to witnesses to the gruesome discovery, the victim's decapitated body was found in a cassava field some 500 metres from his home on the same Mabuye sub-hill.

Local sources said that the deceased was often accused of witchcraft and regularly received anonymous telephone threats following a land dispute he won earlier this year.

SOS-Torture Burundi deplores the persistence of cases of targeted killings in Cibitoke province, often committed with impunity or followed by inconclusive investigations. It calls for a credible and thorough investigation to identify the perpetrators and punish them in accordance with the law.

- On the night of Saturday 27 April 2024, at around 10 p.m., an imbonerakure¹ and teacher at Nyakeru primary school known as François-Xavier Habonimana was shot dead by unidentified individuals who had ambushed him near his home on the Mugitega hill of the Bugendana zone and commune, in the province of Gitega (central Burundi).

According to local sources, François-Xavier Habonimana, who was also a member of the Bugendana Communal Council, had spent the evening sharing a drink with his friends at the Bugendana trading centre. On his way home, some 500 metres away, François-Xavier Habonimana was shot several times in the head and chest and died instantly.

The same sources believe that the assassination of François-Xavier Habonimana was linked to internal squabbles over positioning on the electoral lists for the next elections in 2025.

SOS-Torture Burundi is calling on the police and judicial authorities to carry out a thorough and meticulous investigation to identify the perpetrators of this murder and bring them to justice.

2. Cases of abduction or enforced disappearance

- Information received by SOS-Torture Burundi revealed that on 18 April 2024, three members of the same family, Tharcisse Ndayiragije, Nestor Ndaruhekeye alias Mandela and Aristide Nitunga, were abducted on the same day by unidentified individuals and have been missing ever since.

According to local sources, Tharcisse Ndayiragije, aged 38 and the father of 5 children, left his native hill of Buringa, in the commune of Muhuta of the Rumonge

¹ Youth league affiliated to the ruling party, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD).

province (south-west of Burundi) in the direction of the economic capital Bujumbura with a view to lodging a complaint with the Ministry of Justice in a land dispute that has been opposing him to the Sylvestre Barangeza family for more than four years. After speaking to some of his family on the phone at around 2 p.m. to tell them that he had just arrived in Bujumbura, Tharcisse Ndayiragije became unreachable by telephone. His family waited in vain for him to return home and searched everywhere for him, without success.

According to the same sources, Nestor Ndaruhekeye alias Mandela, a police driver for the provincial commissioner of Rumonge with the rank of master corporal, was in Bujumbura to repair his service vehicle. Before disappearing on the same day, 18 April 2024, he told his colleagues that he was going to meet his brother [Tharcisse Ndayiragije] who had gone down to Bujumbura before returning to the countryside. Since that day, no one has seen Nestor Ndaruhekeye alias Mandela; his family has tried to search for him everywhere without success. Strangely, however, the same sources revealed that the vehicle under repair and Master Corporal Nestor Ndaruhekeye's effects, including his service rifle, had been taken to the Bujumbura municipal police station located in the former offices of the Special Research Bureau (BSR).

In the case of Aristide Nitunga (Tharcisse Ndayiragije's brother-in-law), a Hauge Family microfinance agent, he left his home in the Musaga district of Bujumbura on 18 April 2024 to go to work as usual. However, his housemates waited in vain for Aristide Nitunga to return and tried to call him on his telephone, which was switched off. They even went to his department the next day to enquire about Aristide Nitunga's whereabouts, but were told that he had returned at the end of the day as usual and that he had not even asked for time off to be away that day. Aristide Nitunga has been missing since that day and no one knows his whereabouts.

Family members believe that the disappearance of Tharcisse Nitunga, Nestor Ndaruhekeye alias Mandela and Aristide Nitunga is directly linked to the land dispute with the family of Sylvestre Barangenza.

SOS-Torture Burundi is calling on the police to carry out in-depth investigations into the whereabouts and fate of these three people, who have so far been reported missing, and to initiate criminal proceedings against their abductors.

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.