

29 March 2023

To : His Excellency Mr. Evariste Ndayishimiye, President of the Republic of Burundi

With copy for information to :

His Excellency Mr. Gervais Ndirakobuca, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Burundi

Her Excellency Mrs Domine Banyankimbona, the Minister of Justice, Republic of Burundi

Mr Sylvestre Nyandwi, Attorney General of the Republic of Burundi

Mr. Sixte Vigny Nimuraba, President of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights

Your Excellency Mr. President,

We, the undersigned, Burundian women human rights defenders, appeal to Your Excellency, in your capacity as President and Supreme Magistrate of the Republic of Burundi, to take all necessary measures to ensure that our six (6) sisters women human rights defenders and our two (2) brothers human rights defenders currently in detention, are released immediately and unconditionally.

These are : Journalist **Mme Floriane IRANGABIYE** of the online radio IGICANIRO, detained for seven months, **Mme Emilienne Sibomana**, trade union leader at the Lycée Technique Christ Roi, member of the *National Federation of Teachers' Unions* (Fédération Nationale des Syndicats des Enseignants (FENASEB)), arrested on 27 January 2023 and detained in the Central prison of Gitega, **Maître Sonia NDIKUMASABO** and **Maître Marie EMERUSABE** of the *women Lawyers Association* (Association des Femmes Juristes du Burundi, AFJB)), **Mme Sylvana INAMAHORO** of the *Association for Peace and Human Rights* (Association pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme, APDH) detained since 14 February 2023, as well as our brothers **M. Audace HAVYARIMANA** and **M. Prosper RUNYANGE**, who also work for APDH. They are all detained for their patriotic commitment to the defence of human rights in their capacity as journalists, educators or members of human rights organisations.

You may recall, Your Excellency, that **Mme Floriane IRANGABIYE**, who is detained in Muyinga prison, accused without foundation of "undermining the integrity of the national territory", was sentenced to 10 years in prison and a fine of one million Burundian Francs by the High Court of Mukaza in Bujumbura.

As for **Maître Sonia NDIKUMASABO**, **Maître Marie EMERUSABE**, **Ms. Sylvana INAMAHORO**, **M. Audace HAVYARIMANA** and **M. Prosper RUNYANGE**, detained in Mpimba Central Prison since 16 February 2023, they are accused of 'undermining the proper functioning of public finances', 'insurgency' and 'undermining state security'. As for **Madame Emilienne Sibomana**, who has been detained in the central prison of Gitega since 8 February

2023 for having reported repeated acts of rape committed against young girls at the school by its headmaster, she's accused of slanderous denunciation.

Your Excellency Mr. President, we refer to Resolution A/RES/68/181 unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 2013, on the "Promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders/Defenders."

The same resolution emphasises in paragraph 11 that " *the fundamental principle of the independence of the judiciary and that procedural safeguards must be in place in accordance with States' obligations and commitments under international human rights law in order to protect women human rights defenders from unwarranted criminal actions and sanctions as a consequence of their work in line with the Declaration*". It is therefore crucial to ensure, as the resolution emphasises, that " domestic law and administrative provisions and their application should enable the work of women human rights defenders, including by avoiding any criminalization or stigmatization of the important activities and legitimate role of women human rights defenders".

Your Excellency, we equally refer to your own declaration, during your public address to Burundi wishing them a happy new year 2022, that any detainee who has not violated the integrity of a human being will remain free throughout the judicial proceedings against him.

However, the charges against these individuals seem to stem only from their patriotic activities and the defence of human rights, which is not prohibited by Burundian law. Furthermore, the search for, obtaining and use of financial resources, from internal or foreign sources, which are an integral part of the proper functioning of any organisation and fall within their right to freedom of association, cannot be turned into as an offence.

Your Excellency, at this time, the whole world is continually paying tribute to the work of women human rights defenders who contribute significantly to economic, social and political functioning in their countries, which is undeniably a reality in Burundi as well, the government should value the work of women human rights defenders and give them the recognition they deserve.

Unfortunately, the arbitrary detention of the above-mentioned women/human rights defenders seems to be aimed at intimidating and discouraging the family of women/human rights defenders and severely curtails the space for civil society action in contradiction to your promise to improve the human rights situation in the country and the previously mentioned UN General Assembly Resolution.

It is in this regard that we strongly urge Your Excellency to use your supreme authority to ensure that our brothers and sisters are released immediately and unconditionally, thereby creating a safe and conducive environment for the work of women/human rights defenders and journalists, free from intimidation and reprisals.

Your Excellency, as Mahtama Ghandi said: "*The true measure of a society is the way it treats its most vulnerable members*". The release of the above-mentioned unjustly imprisoned women and men will honour Burundi, which is currently one of the few countries in the world to have the highest number of women human rights defenders in detention.

Please accept, Your Excellency Mr. President of the Republic, the expression of our highest consideration.

Annexe : Signatories

1. Mrs. Marie Louise Baricako, Mouvement INAMAHORO
2. Mrs. Jeanne d'Arc Zaninyana, Mouvement des Femmes et Filles pour la Paix et la Sécurité au Burundi (MFFPS) ;
3. Mrs. Eulalie Nibizi, Coalition Burundaise des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme
4. Ms. Chantal Mutamuriza, Light for All
5. Mrs. Anitha Gateretse, Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT-Burundi)
6. Mrs. Justine Nkurunziza, COSOME