

BURUNDIAN LIGUE OF HUMAN RIGHTS "ITEKA"

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Weekly bulletin « ITEKA N'IJAMBO » n°431 of the Burundian Ligue of Human Rights "ITEKA"

Week from 15 – 21 July 2024



In memory of Madam Marie Claudette Kwizera, Treasurer of Iteka, reported missing since December 10 2015. From December 2015 to 21 July 2024, Iteka has documented at least 697 cases of enforced disappearances

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ACRONYMS

BBN	: <i>Burundi Bureau of Standards</i>
CNDD-FDD	: <i>National Council for the Defense of Democracy</i>
COGERCO	: <i>Cotton Management Company</i>
DRC	: <i>Democratic Republic of Congo</i>
PJ	: <i>Judicial Police</i>
SNR	: <i>National Intelligence Service</i>
GBV	: <i>Gender Based Violation</i>

0. INTRODUCTION

This bulletin covers the economic and security context that marked this period. It also deals with civil and political rights, economic social and cultural rights and ends with a conclusion.

Therefore, over this reporting period, the human rights and security situation was reported as follows: at least 13 people including 3 corpses.

Among the victims were 4 women. Members of political parties were not spared. Hence, two members of CNDD FDD party were killed.

Imbonerakure, administration officials, SNR agents and police officers are singled out as the alleged perpetrators of most of these human rights violations and assassinations.

1. ECONOMIC AND SECURITY CONTEXT

1.1. ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Statement by President Ndayishimiye on the probable discovery of a large quantity of hidden cassiterite

On July 17, 2024, during his visit to Kirundo province, the President of the Republic Evariste Ndayishimiye told the press that a large quantity of cassiterite and coltan had been discovered that would lift Burundi out of poverty. Officials of the mining company, Burundi Metal Company (BUMECO), which operates in this province, said they had made the discovery of the century, even speaking of a fabulous treasure. Images were posted on the official presidential account showing BUMECO CEO Gaspard Ngendakumana telling the president that a single gallery in Murehe mine contains 12,700,000 tons of cassiterite worth over \$50 billion.

It's difficult to confirm that this is a discovery, given that there are reports that the mine had been exploited for 50 years by the Belgians during the colonial era, who then hermetically sealed it after independence in order to hide any trace of its existence from the Burundians, a statement not viewed in the same way by mining experts and legislation in the field, which states that whenever such mining operations or prospecting come to an end, the sites must be restored, by closing the tunnels and other boreholes dug for this purpose. These statements by President Evariste are reminiscent of those made by his predecessor, who constantly extolled the richness of Burundi's subsoil, but unfortunately Burundians are still impatiently awaiting the product of these minerals.

Burundi should do away with mere declarations and translate into action its initiatives by genuinely tackling the challenges¹ haunting the mineral exploitation sector, such as the absence of a modern laboratory and the purchase price of minerals, which is lower than that of other countries in the region (a ton of minerals costs 0, 9 USD in Burundi, compared with 1.4 USD in the sub-region), illegal expropriations at extraction sites, conflicts resulting from disagreements between the authorities and site owners, and the instability of the laws on the sector.

Sapor beverage banned in Mwaro province

On July 16, 2024, the governor of Mwaro province, Colonel Gaspard Gasanzwe, issued a decree banning the marketing and consumption of "Sapor wine", a beverage with an alcohol content of 16% by volume, throughout Mwaro province. He took this measure after the Head of State's speech in Kayanza province on July 13, 2024, stating that he would support any governor who would suspend the sale of this drink

¹Burundi Echo, Le Burundi pourrait-il redynamiser le secteur minier avant la fin de cette année, février 2024

in his province. This situation has arisen when other drinks in plastic bottles with the same alcohol content can still be found in shops in Mwaro province. These include “Boss Dring”, a 16%-alcohol drink made in Quarter 10 Ngagara in Bujumbura mairie, and other alcoholic beverages such as “Susuruka Wine” and “Kick”. All these plastic bottles bear the BBN certification mark, which is responsible for verifying and certifying the legality of these products. Traders say they don't understand the decision, and don't know where to stand for the losses incurred.

1.2. SECURITY CONTEXT

1.2.1. PERSONS KILLED BY UNIDENTIFIED PEOPLE

A woman killed in Bukinanyana commune, Cibitoke province

On the night of July 20-21, 2024, at around 11pm, on Mvyave hill, Ndora zone, Bukinanyana commune, Cibitoke province, Collette Nduwimana, aged 69, was killed with machetes by unidentified persons. According to the victim's neighbors, the assailants caught her sleeping. Last-minute gasps alerted the neighbors, who came to the victim's aid, but it was too late to save her. According to witnesses, the murder was motivated by land disputes, especially as the deceased had just won a case at Cibitoke High Court against some of her relatives.

A local citizen contacted expressed concern about the violent behavior of Imbonerakure, who were likely to commit crimes and even killings. The relatives and family of the deceased are calling for thorough investigations to shed light on the reasons behind the murder and bring the alleged perpetrators to justice. Bukinanyana administrator confirms the facts and admits that investigations are underway.

Five bodies, including two women, found in Buganda commune, Cibitoke province

According to information received by Ligue Iteka on July 15, 2024, 5 decomposing bodies were found in Buganda commune, Cibitoke province, over a period of no more than a week.

On July 16, 2024, a decomposing and roped body of a man was found on Ruhagarika hill, some 800 meters from Rusizi coastline on the border with the DRC. On the same date, two bodies of men were found on the 7th street of the same area and commune.

On July 12, 2024, two unidentified decomposing bodies were found on the 3rd street in Ndava zone of the same Cibitoke commune, close to Kagunuzi river. All these bodies were buried without investigation by Imbonerakure youths on the orders of the commune administrator.

On the night of July 11, 2024, local residents reported a vehicle with tinted windows driving around the surrounding area. The Buganda administrator admits that investigations are underway. As for the hasty burials without investigation, he claims that they were carried out to protect the population from possible illnesses.

A woman, a member of CNDD-FDD party killed and a man wounded in Rugombo commune, Cibitoke province.

On July 15, 2024, on the 11th street of Rusiga hill, Rugombo commune, Cibitoke province, Jeannette Ndayisenga, a 45-year-old CNDD-FDD party member living on the 10th street of Rusiga hill, who was guarding her cassava field, was killed by unidentified assailants and Prime Manimpa, her husband, a 50-year-old CNDD-FDD party member, was wounded with machetes in a field very early in the morning. Carême Bizozwa, Governor of Cibitoke province, confirms this incident and speaks of investigations already underway to find out the reasons and perpetrators of this despicable act. The mortal remains of the woman and her agonizing husband were found at around 9 a.m. by farmers out working in the fields.

The same source admits that the couple, fearful of being robbed of their land and seeing their agricultural produce pillaged, had spent the whole night in their field to watch over it.

More than 150 hectares of land have been taken from the hands of farmers by senior civilian and military dignitaries close to CNDD-FDD party, pretexting that it is State land. The Governor of Cibitoke dismisses these accusations, explaining quite simply that the State is in the process of recovering its land holdings from COGERCO.

1.2.2. PERSONS KILLED FOLLOWING SETTLING OF SCORES

Four people killed in Gisuru commune, province Ruyigi

On July 21, 2024, at around 8 p.m., on Kididibizi sub-hill, on Kigamba hill, Gisuru commune, Ruyigi province, three persons, including Philibert Karimanzira, aged 18, from Yogero hill, Gisuru commune, Ruyigi province, and Serges Miburo, aged 31, from Gitanga hill, Bubanza commune and province, were stabbed to death with knives, wounding the other, who was quickly rushed to Gisuru hospital for treatment. According to eyewitnesses, two alleged perpetrators were arrested, Elias Conderereje, aged 25, from Yogero hill, Gisuru commune, and Christophe Hatungimana, aged 26, from Rutonde hill, Gisuru commune, Ruyigi province. According to the same witnesses, the reason for the murder was linked to a dispute between Kadogo, from Bubanza, and Philbert Karimanzira, in which each wanted to leave with an unidentified girl who was on the spot. Later, this conflict opposed gold miners against the local youth, and Kadogo stabbed Philbert Karimanzira to death. After killing him, Kadogo fled, while the family of the deceased revenged by killing two people, including Serges Miburo, and wounding another, Siyawo, also from Bubanza. Gad Ninganza, commune administrator, and Isaac, communal commissioner in Gisuru, went to the scene of the crime, and a judicial police officer took note. Investigations are continuing in search of other alleged perpetrators. Siyawo, who was injured and evacuated to hospital, also died on arrival.

A body found in Gitega commune and province

On July 15, 2024, at around 7 a.m., in Yoba quarter, Gitega commune and province, a body of Fabrice Nimpagaritse, aged 22, from Mwurire hill, Bugendana commune, Gitega province, son of Sagahuna Longin and Mudende G  n  rose, was found in Kuwankana. According to eyewitnesses, the victim was employed in a shop belonging to Bonaventure Habonimana alias "Mwarabu" and that there were conflicts between them linked to the missing of one million recorded by his employee during the control. His body was found in front of the gate of Bonaventure's home, with a rope around his throat, although there were no wounds or marks on his neck. According to the same eyewitnesses, Bonaventure was arrested and jailed to Gitega provincial police station for investigations. The funeral took place the following day at Kirimbi cemetery on Bugendana hill, attended by family members.

A CNDD-FDD party member killed in commune Nyanza-lac, Makamba province

On July 19, 2024, at around 11 p.m., on Mugerama hill, Nyanza-lac zone and commune, Makamba province, Volko Ez  chiel, CNDD-FDD party member, was stabbed 4 times in the chest in an ambush in front of the entrance to his home. The victim had won a land dispute with his brothers on July 18, 2024. According to family witnesses, three alleged perpetrators fled, and the day after his murder Laban Habonimana and Metusela Hakizimana, two of Volko's neighboring brothers, were arrested by police at Nyanza-lac communal police station for investigative purposes. The victim's body was taken to Nyanza-lac hospital mortuary.

1.3.3. OTHER SECURITY INCIDENTS

Military objects and ammunition found in Kabezi commune, Bujumbura rural province

On July 17, 2024, around 9 p.m., on Kigaramango sub-hill, Ramba hill, Kabezi commune, Bujumbura rural, a child on his way home saw a plastic basket. Out of curiosity, he approached it to see what was in it and saw ammunition, so he called his father Berchimans, nicknamed Muhumure. The latter alerted the local administration, who in turn called the police. At the scene, the following items of ammunition were found: 5 magazines loaded with a FAL rifle; 5 empty FAL magazines; 3 magazines of 30 shells loaded of a Kalashnikov AK47 rifle; 1 magazine of 40 shells loaded; 1 empty magazine of 30 shells; 160 Ak47 shells; 16 FAL shells ; 24 FM shells ; 2 defensive grenades; 2 kits (for grenades and magazines) and small-diameter electrical wires. The items found were kept in the warehouse of Kabezi communal police station.

One person injured in Buhiga commune, Karuzi province

On July 15, 2024, at around 7 p.m., on Karunyinya hill, Buhiga zone and commune, Karuzi province, Jean Marie Gahungu, a 31-year-old CNDD-FDD member who had gone mad in 2021 after killing his mother and two sisters with a machete, was imprisoned in Gitega prison. According to witnesses in Gitega prison, he killed an inmate before being transferred to Kamenge psychiatric hospital “chez le Gentil” and released under presidential pardon last year. According to witnesses, Gahungu Jean Marie took over and threatened people wanting to kill them. On July 15, 2024, he was wounded by unidentified people in the right arm with a machete, but refused to be taken to hospital. The population of this hill is concerned by his behavior and qualifies him as a public danger, but the local administration does not react to take any measures.

A newborn abandoned in Bukeye commune, Muramvya province

On July 18, 2024, on Busekera hill in Muramvya province Bukeye commune, a newborn was found alive but dumped in a compost pit by a 21-year-old single mother Odette Nzoyikorera. According to local witnesses, she was alone at home, gave birth, threw her baby into a compost pit wrapped in a loincloth and fled. At around 2 p.m., Odette's mother heard the baby's cries, retrieved her and informed the neighbors, who went looking for Odette and found her at a friend's house on nearby Kigereka hill, where she had been hiding. The hill heads took her to Bukeye commune police station, where she was taken to Muramvya hospital the following day, where she and her baby are being looked after by a policewoman from Muramvya Judicial Police.

Fire in four houses in Bururi commune and province

On July 15, 2024, four houses on Rushemeza hill in Bururi commune and province caught fire, one of which was used for illicit fuel trading. According to eyewitnesses, Gilbert Niyonkuru, the hill head, was arrested by the police for investigation on suspicion of complicity in this trade. The goods inside were completely burned. According to an administrative source in Bururi and some inhabitants of Rushemeza hill, the fire was caused by this fuel. The fire occurred when the sale of fuel on the black market had become a reality in many parts of the country.

II. CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Burundi is one of the countries adhering to the international covenant on civil and political rights (1965) and its optional protocol (1976) without any reservation on May 9, 1990, which as part of its implementation, Burundi took measures in domestic legislation in particular in its constitution of June 7, 2018 (Main Law) in its article 19 which guarantees that all the rights proclaimed and guaranteed by regularly ratified international texts are an integral part of this constitution, implementing texts are put in place, namely the penal code of December 29, 2017 and the criminal procedure code of May 11, 2018 and other institutions for the protection of human rights in Burundi have been created.

II.1. THE RIGHT TO LIBERTY

Article 38 of Burundi's constitutional law guarantees all individuals the right to a fair trial and to have their case heard and decided within a reasonable time

II.1.1 RIGHT TO PRESS FREEDOM

A journalist released after two-day detention in Bweru commune, Ruyigi province

Information received by Ligue Iteka on July 15, 2024 indicates that on July 13, 2024, in Bweru, Pantaléon Ntakarutimana, correspondent for Radio Culture and Jimbere magazine in Ruyigi province, was arrested and jailed in the communal police cell, before being released on July 15, 2024, at around 11am. The journalist was arrested on the orders of Diane Nibitanga, administrator of Bweru commune, while seeking information about a body in the administrator's vehicle.

According to the victim, although he was released, his cell phones were still confiscated by the commune authorities.

According to witnesses on the spot, the administrator's vehicle was carrying a body of a person who had died after being hit by a vehicle. The administrator was looking for the mortuary at Bweru hospital, but the victim's family refused this request, as they believed it was a way of hiding the perpetrator of this accident and/or the owner of this vehicle that caused the death of this person.

In his search for information, Pantaléon gave the floor to the victim's family and for balanced information or the administrator's version, instead of giving her version, she ordered the imprisonment of this journalist who was poorly led to the police cell by the police officers in charge of security. According to the same witnesses, Pantaléon was arrested even though he had shown all the documents authorizing him to work as a journalist, in particular his press card.

The editors of Jimbere magazine and Radio Culture are calling intimidation of journalists to stop, for their equipment to be handed over unconditionally and for the profession of journalism to be respected.

III. ECONOMIC SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Burundi ratified accession to the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights dated March 14, 1990, adopted in New York on December 16, 1966.

Non-payment by the population in Karuzi province

The ANAGESSA project had promised the population that the last payment on maize purchases would be made on July 15, 2024, but the population waited until July 20, 2024. No information has been given as to the reason for this delay, and this has put the maize producers' minds at rest. As for those who have sold their coffee in factories, up to July 20 no payment has been made to these coffee producers.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ligue Iteka notes a continued deterioration of human rights situation across the country.

It protests against the impunity of the crimes observed and asks the Minister of Justice to ensure the strict application of the law against the perpetrators of the crimes.