On 29 March 2020, Jean Bosco Ngabirano, a member of the Congrès national pour la liberté (CNL), was sitting in a bar in Mahwa zone, in Gitega province, when members of the youth league of the ruling party, the Imbonerakure, who were sitting a few tables away, started singing songs praising the ruling party. Ngabirano and those with him countered them with songs of the CNL.

A few hours later, Seconde Ndayisenga, the administrator of Ryansoro commune (the most senior local government official), arrived and tensions flared. The Imbonerakure told the administrator that Ngabirano was a thief and a troublemaker from neighbouring Bururi province. An eyewitness in the bar said the administrator called Ngabirano over, and they had a tense exchange. It is not known what they discussed.

After the exchange, according to a witness and media reports, the administrator ordered a policeman to “shoot that dog”, referring to Ngabirano. Ngabirano fled, pursued by the policeman. The policeman then
returned to the bar, saying he didn’t want to shoot him. According to the same sources, Ndayisenga then asked *Imbonerakure* in the bar to catch and kill Ngabirano.

It’s unclear how the *Imbonerakure* caught Ngabirano. One source said that they blocked the roads near the bar and stopped Ngabirano at place called *ku kabishato* in Mahwa.

A man in his 60s said he had passed by the *Institut technique agricole du Burundi* (ITAB) in Mahwa when he heard screams. He heard someone say: “You swore that you would bring the entire population of Mahwa to the CNL. It’s over. You’ll no longer succeed.” Then two young men approached him. “They made me get on my knees,” he said. “One carried a knife and the other a spear. They ordered me to leave; (they told me to) run.” *Imbonerakure* prevented other passers-by from approaching the place.

In an article by *Radio Publique Africaine* (RPA) on 6 April, Elie Nimubona, an *Imbonerakure* leader in Mahwa allegedly involved in the attack, said Ngabirano wasn’t killed for political reasons. “Don’t let them claim that he was a member of the CNL. Let them admit rather that he was a thief. He wasn’t a victim of his political beliefs.”

A CNL senior official, however, confirmed to the Burundi Human Rights Initiative (BHRI) that Ngabirano was a party member.

Two sources, independent of one another, as well as a media report, named *Imbonerakure* allegedly involved in attacking Ngabirano: Nimubona, Donatien Ciza, Vianney Manirakiza, Gode Ntigoheka, and a man named Bienvenu. One witness said he saw these *Imbonerakure* chasing Ngabirano.

Students found Ngabirano’s body the next day near ITAB. Family members and media reports claim Ngabirano’s body had been mutilated. BHRI was unable to confirm these allegations. In a photo seen by BHRI, Ngabirano’s face had the markings of what appeared to have been a severe beating, with his eyes swollen shut. Residents and family members refused to bury his body until those responsible were arrested. Ngabirano’s body lay in the Mahwa health centre for four days.

According to a member of Ngabirano’s family, a judicial official visited the crime scene, but didn’t complete a police report, despite residents offering him information about the *Imbonerakure* allegedly responsible for the killing.

The family member asked the judicial official on 30 March why he hadn’t completed a judicial report. He claimed he hadn’t gone to the crime scene. Another family member strongly refuted this, saying he had spoken to the judicial official while he was at the crime scene and had asked him to arrest one of the men allegedly involved in the killing.

Ndayisenga, the *commune* administrator, did not visit the crime scene but instead sent the *chef de colline* from Mahwa, a lower-level local official. There was confusion over whom Ndayisenga had delegated to bury Ngabirano’s body. At first, it seemed she had asked a family member to organise the burial. Then Ndayisenga ordered the *chef de colline* from Mahwa to bury the body. The official, however, claimed Ndayisenga had not given him clear instructions about how to procure or pay for the materials for the
burial. When Ngabirano’s family member confronted Ndayisenga about this confusion on the phone, she told him to deal with the burial himself: “I put it in your hands. Do it. And if you don’t do it, leave me alone. I have other work to do.” The family member responded: “(How) can you tell me that you’re an authority, (but) you have other things to do while someone was killed in your sector?” Ndayisenga hung up the phone.

Two days after Ngabirano’s death, a family member asked a judicial official why arrest warrants had not been issued for those alleged to have killed Ngabirano. “My brother,” the official replied, “I’m not going to issue those warrants. Regarding the death (of Ngabirano), even the administrator is complicit. Stop wearing yourself out over this. These people (who killed Ngabirano) are ‘supported’.” The judicial official was referring to how *Imbonerakure* are often protected by ruling party officials and shielded from justice.

A policeman later told the same family member that the *Imbonerakure* who had allegedly killed Ngabirano were not going to be arrested: “We didn’t fail to arrest these people; these people are ‘supported’.”

On the evening of 2 April, Venant Manirambona, the governor of Gitega, arrived in Mahwa. He asked residents what happened the evening Ngabirano was killed. According to sources close to the victim, the governor asked Ngabirano’s father to get into his truck and they drove to the health centre. The governor told him that they were going to bury Ngabirano. When they arrived, the policeman, who accompanied the governor, slapped the security guard at the health centre who refused to open the door to the room holding Ngabirano’s body. The security guard then opened the door and police loaded Ngabirano’s body into the truck.

The policeman and other unidentified men buried Ngabirano’s body in a cemetery in Mahwa while the governor looked on.

BHRI wrote to national government officials asking what action the authorities had taken following Ngabirano’s murder. BHRI also wrote to the governor and the prosecutor of Gitega province with additional questions about the alleged perpetrators. Only the governor of Gitega replied, simply asking for information about BHRI and its relations with the Burundian government; he did not comment on the case. BHRI phoned the administrator of Ryansoro *commune*, Seconde Ndayisenga, and asked for her response to the killing of Ngabirano; she would not reply to any questions.

For further information about the series, read “The Deadly Price of Opposition”.

www.burundihri.org/english
www.twitter.com/@BHRI_IDHB
contact@burundihri.org
+1 267 896 3399 (WhatsApp)