



Two years on, no justice for political killings

An open letter to President Évariste Ndayishimiye

30 June 2022

Your Excellency,

We write to you on the second anniversary of your inauguration as president of Burundi.

Two years ago, shortly after you were sworn in, the Burundi Human Rights Initiative wrote you an open letter, describing how six Burundians were killed between October 2019 and May 2020 because of their political affiliations. Their cases are listed below.

Most of the victims were members of the opposition *Congrès national pour la liberté* (CNL). Members of the *Imbonerakure*, the youth league of the ruling party – the *Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie* (CNDD-FDD) – , were responsible for most of these crimes. In some of these cases, *Imbonerakure* acted in collusion with – or with the apparent support of – CNDD-FDD representatives or local government officials, some of whom have since been promoted.

- On 7 November 2019, CNL member Évariste Nyabenda died from his injuries in Ngozi province. *Imbonerakure* had attacked him when he tried to stop them from beating fellow CNL members.
- On 12 December 2019, in Bujumbura province, Désiré Ntahondabasigiye, a local CNL representative, was shot dead through a window of his house. Two *Imbonerakure* with guns were seen near his home before he was killed.
- On 4 March 2020, Fauzia Basesuwabo, a CNL member, died from her injuries in Muyinga province, a few days after *Imbonerakure* beat her, as well as her husband and their three sons.
- On 9 March 2020, Albert Niyondiko, who was suspected of supporting the armed opposition, was shot dead in Bururi province, during an operation by the police and national intelligence service (SNR).
- On 29 March 2020, the administrator of Ryansoro *commune* in Gitega province, Seconde Ndayisenga, ordered *Imbonerakure* to kill CNL member Jean Bosco Ngabirano. His body was found the next day; he appeared to have been severely beaten.
- On 4 May 2020, two weeks before the elections, CNL member Richard Havyarimana was abducted in Mwaro province. He was found dead in a river three days later, with deep gashes on his head.

There has been no justice for the killings of Évariste, Désiré, Fauzia, Albert or Jean Bosco. No one has been prosecuted for their murders, investigations have been aborted and some of the victims' families were threatened to stifle the truth.

Only in the case of Richard Havyarimana has there been a semblance of justice. In August 2020, a court in Mwaro province sentenced two *Imbonerakure* to 15 years in prison for his murder. Other individuals suspected of involvement in his abduction were never arrested, and one of the convicted *Imbonerakure* has been seen outside of prison, in his home area.

These events did not happen in isolation, nor are they a thing of the past. Since you became president, we have documented several other cases of political killings, enforced disappearances and torture of government opponents, including the following:

- On 25 January 2021, 64-year-old Égide Sindayigaya died in a police detention centre in Rumonge province, after the SNR tortured him and after his brother was shot dead by the police.
- On 15 May 2021, a CNL member known as Rasta was found dead in Bubanza province, after *Imbonerakure* beat him severely the previous day.
- On 30 June 2021, police in Bururi province shot dead Bernardino Baserukiye, who had recently been released from prison and was accused of being a rebel by the local police commissioner, Moïse Arakaza.
- On 9 July 2021, men in military uniform abducted CNL member Élie Ngomirakiza in Bujumbura. He was never seen again and is believed to have been killed.
- Between 29 November and 3 December 2021, CNL member Innocent Barutwanayo died while detained at the SNR headquarters in Bujumbura, after being tortured by the SNR in Kayanza.
- On 15 December 2021, CNL member Augustin Matata died after being tortured at the SNR headquarters in Bujumbura.

In only one of these cases from 2021 has there been a glimmer of justice. In December 2021, SNR agent Gérard Ndayisenga was arrested for his role in the death of Augustin Matata, just one of the many crimes he has committed during his years of service at the SNR. Ndayisenga's arrest was significant. You promised he would be "punished in an exemplary manner". Will you ensure that the justice system holds him accountable for the torture, killings and other serious crimes he committed as an SNR official and tries him without delay, in credible proceedings?

In many public speeches over the past two years, you have spoken forcefully about the need for justice in Burundi, saying that "nobody is above the law" and that "the wrongs of the justice (sector) are being corrected". But there is still a big gap between your promises and the reality. The justice system has failed to carry out substantial reforms and stand up to political manipulation. This lack of progress has been hugely disappointing for victims and their families; they have the right to know the truth and see those responsible face justice.

Among the 12 cases listed above, there are only two in which there has been progress in bringing some of those responsible to justice. The impunity protecting the perpetrators of the other killings is typical of almost all the serious human rights violations against real or perceived government opponents in the last two years.

Your Excellency, when you took office, many Burundians, as well as international actors, believed you were genuinely committed to promoting justice. They wanted to give you the benefit of the doubt. Two years later, that optimism has started to fade.

You have repeatedly promised to put an end to pervasive corruption in the justice system, but you have not ended the interference by ruling party members, intelligence agents and other officials that undermines the independence of the judiciary.

In your capacity as head of state, as guarantor of the independence of the judiciary and as the authority who oversees the intelligence agency, you have the ability to make sure that powerful men around you – and those who work for them – are brought to justice. You can put an end to impunity once and for all. You recently stated that “impunity creates anarchy”. You are right. Only when there is justice for serious crimes, such as the cases cited in this letter, will Burundi recover from its past and be able to focus on the social and economic challenges ahead.

Yours sincerely,

The Burundi Human Rights Initiative

For further information on the cases mentioned in the open letter, read "[The Deadly Price of Opposition](#)" and "[The road ahead: will Burundi bring its torturers to justice?](#)"

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