

URGENT ACTION

RELEASE JOURNALIST JAILED FOR CRITICAL VIEWS

On 30 March, the Court of Appeal of Mukaza in Bujumbura, Burundi held a hearing session on the case of Burundian journalist Floriane Irangabiye. She had appealed the 2 January decision of the High Court of Mukaza, which convicted her of the trumped-up charge of “undermining the integrity of the national territory” and sentenced her to 10 years in prison and a fine of one million Burundian francs (around USD 482). The Court of Appeal has 30 days to rule on the appeal. Floriane Irangabiye has been detained since August 2022. Her prosecution stems from the peaceful exercise of her human rights and for her work as a journalist. Amnesty International calls for her immediate and unconditional release and for her conviction to be quashed.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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Minister of Justice

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Dear Minister,

I am concerned by the continued arbitrary detention and unfair prosecution of journalist **Floriane Irangabiye**.

On 30 March, the Court of Appeal of Mukaza in Bujumbura, Burundi, held a hearing on the appeal against her conviction and sentencing to ten years in prison and one million Burundian francs (around USD 482). The court will make its decision within 30 days of the hearing.

On 30 August 2022, Floriane Irangabiye was arrested by Burundian security forces while on a family visit in Bujumbura. The High Court of Mukaza's found her guilty of “undermining the integrity of the national territory’ on 2 January. According to her lawyers the High Court failed to consider procedural irregularities during her arrest – including the denial of access to her lawyer when she was first interrogated- and the lack of any admissible evidence against her.

During her trial at the end of 2022, the prosecution presented comments made during an August 2022 show on Radio Igicaniro. At this Burundian online media outlet, Floriane Irangabiye and her guests criticized the government of Burundi. In an audio record of the show retrieved by the prosecutor, she purportedly said: “the population is resigned to the evils of the leaders of Burundi, citizens do not express themselves for fear of being killed, we call on Burundians to brave the fear.” The prosecution also presented as evidence photos of her posing with President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and former President Pierre Buyoya at public events. She was also accused of participating in meetings held by Burundian youths in exile in Rwanda.

Floriane Irangabiye's prosecution is politically motivated and a sign that the Burundian authorities intend to continue restricting the civic space, despite promises by President Evariste to improve the country's human rights record.

I urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure that Floriane Irangabiye is immediately and unconditionally released. Her conviction and ongoing arbitrary detention are in violation of her rights to freedom of expression and fair trial.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Floriane Irangabiye has been living in Rwanda for more than a decade. Before the 2015 crisis, she used to make regular trips between the capital, Kigali, where she resides, and Bujumbura, Burundi, where her family lives.

When former President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for a third term in office in April 2015, many Burundians took to the streets to express their frustration against the decision that they believed violated the 2005 Burundian Constitution which limited presidential terms to two terms of 5 years. Her trip in August 2022 was the first time she visited her family in Bujumbura since 2015.

Burundi's civil society and media organizations were among the first targets of the government repression in 2015. The government suspended or closed most independent human rights organizations and media outlets and drove them into exile. Despite promises by President Ndayishimiye to normalize relations with the media in 2021, the Burundian government continues to view the press and human rights work with suspicion, [and severe restrictions on human rights](#), including the right to freedom of expression, remain in place.

Most independent human rights organizations have been unable to resume their activities in Burundi, especially as the Burundian authorities have issued arrest warrants for many of their leading activists, who live in exile. [On 14 February](#), five human rights defenders, Sonia Ndikumasabo, president, and Marie Emerusabe, general coordinator, of Association of Women Lawyers in Burundi (Association des femmes juristes du Burundi, AFJB), Audace Havyarimana, legal representative, Sylvana Inamahoro, executive director, Prosper Runyange, land project coordinator, of Association for Peace and Promotion of Human Rights in Burundi (Association pour la paix et la promotion des droits de l'Homme, APDH) were arrested and accused of rebellion and of undermining internal state security and the functioning of public finances. The charges appear to relate to their relationship with an international organization abroad and the funding they have received from this organization. 12 human rights defenders and journalists were among a group of 34 people [sentenced to life in prison in absentia in June 2020](#) on accusations of involvement in an attempted coup in May 2015; the Supreme Court judgment was not made public until February 2021.

Arrest or detention as punishment for the peaceful exercise of human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, is arbitrary and violates the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights both of which Burundi has ratified. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has determined that those detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights must be immediately released.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: French

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 14 JUNE 2023

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Floriane Irangabiye (She/Her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr16/6414/2023/en/>

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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Chairperson of the National Independent Human Rights Commission

Dr Sixte Vigny Nimuraba

Call for an end to the persecution and unjust prosecution of journalists, human rights defenders, and activists in Burundi.

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Mrs Elisa Nkerabirori

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