

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Pierre Claver Mbonimpa is a prisoner of conscience

Today, Amnesty International formally introduced Pierre Claver Mbonimpa into the Individuals at Risk campaign, which strives to protect the rights of individuals around the world suffering from human rights abuses.

Respected and internationally recognized human rights defender, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, has been imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of his legitimate and conscientiously held beliefs. He is a prisoner of conscience and the Burundian authorities must release him from detention immediately and unconditionally.

Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, President of the local human rights organization, APRODH, the Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (*Association pour la Protection des Droits Humains et des Personnes Détenues*) was arrested around midnight on 15 May 2014.

He was arrested following comments he made on the radio on 6 May 2014 alleging that young men were receiving arms, uniforms and travelling to the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo for military training.

He has since been charged with threatening state security and using false documents.

Following his arrest, his detention was immediately criticized. Pierre Claver Mbonimpa is widely regarded by many as courageous and determined to protect and defend human rights.

At the national level, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa is known to Burundians as being a focal point for victims of human rights abuses, including unlawful killings, torture and sexual or gender-based violence.

Each day that Pierre Claver Mbonimpa spends in prison is another day that this influential human rights defender is prevented from undertaking the most essential and important of human rights work on behalf of the most vulnerable.

Social media sites, local radio and Burundian campaigning groups have been highly active in calling for his release. Each Friday has been labelled by Burundian activists as “Green Friday” (“vendredi vert”) and sympathizers wear green - to represent the colour of the country’s prison uniforms - in solidarity with Pierre Claver Mbonimpa.

Internationally recognized for his work, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa received the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2007 and the Henry Dunant Prize in 2011.

Pierre Claver Mbonimpa has previously been a victim of injustice. A police officer before he was a human rights defender, he was wrongfully imprisoned from 1994 to 1996 for illegal possession of a firearm. His time in prison prompted him to establish APRODH upon his release.

Before his arrest, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa was repeatedly harassed, intimidated and subject to judicial summons in relation to his work on sensitive issues, including violations by state security services.

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