

22 November 2017

Burundi: Incommunicado detention of human rights defender Nestor Nibitanga

On 21 November 2017, Burundian police officers arrested human rights defender **Nestor Nibitanga** and detained him in an undisclosed location. His current whereabouts are unknown.

[Nestor Nibitanga](#) is a former regional representative for **Association Burundaise pour la Protection des Droits Humains et des Personnes Détenues - APRODH** (Burundian Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detainees) in Gitega, a region in central Burundi. The human rights defender served as the principal human rights observer for the organisation until several human rights organisations, including APRODH, were deregistered towards the end of 2016.

On 21 November 2017, in the early hours of the morning and under orders of the Commissioner of Police of Gitega province, police officers arrived at Nestor Nibitanga's residence in the Musinzira district of Gitega and began a systematic search of his house. They confiscated documents relating to his time in APRODH. Upon finding the documents, police reportedly suggested that possession of such materials could justify a charge of "threatening national security", a serious crime under the Burundian penal code. Police subsequently detained the human rights defender and brought him to an undisclosed location.

There has been an escalation of violence in the country arising from the political crisis in April 2015 when President Pierre Nkurunziza announced that he would run for a third term in clear violation of Burundi's constitution, which resulted in a crackdown on any critical voices, including human rights defenders. Since the beginning of this crisis, human rights organisations, including APRODH, have been consistently harassed by the authorities, along with their leaders who have been particularly targeted by security forces. In October 2016, upon the announcement of the suspension of APRODH and [other human rights organisations](#) by the Minister of Interior and Patriotic Education, the NGOs were criticised for allegedly going beyond their mandate and taking part in activities which could be considered as harmful to national security and public order. Faced with this type of criminalisation of human rights activism in Burundi, many members of APRODH and other human rights organisations have been forced into exile, while those who have remained have had to seriously reduce their legitimate activities for their own safety.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the incommunicado detention of Nestor Nibitanga as it believes that he has been targeted solely due to his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights. Front Line Defenders also remains deeply concerned at the continued detention of [Germain Rukuki](#) who is charged with "breaching the internal security of the State" and "rebellion" for his previous work with **Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture – ACAT-Burundi** (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture), an NGO suspended by the Burundi government in November 2015.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Burundi to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Nestor Nibitanga, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Inform Nestor Nibitanga's family and lawyer of the location of his detention, and allow them immediate and unfettered access to him;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Nestor Nibitanga while in detention adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Burundi and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.