



Association Burundaise pour la Protection
des Droits Humains et des Personnes
Détenues,

« A.PRO.D.H »

APRODH statement on the deadly fire in Gitega prison.

Please don't let them go alone without farewell from their families.

It was with amazement that APRODH learned of the deaths of dozens of inmates following the fire that broke out in Gitega prison on the morning of December 07, 2021. A delegation of four ministers from the government of Gitega led by the First Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi, Prosper Bazombanza went to the scene, after a few hours of the fire, and declared that of the 1,500 prisoners, it deplores 38 dead, including 12 asphyxiated and 26 dead from deep burns, as well as 69 injured, 34 of whom were evacuated to hospital. Regarding the origin of this fire, the government of Burundi speaks of a short circuit.

According to witnesses on the spot, the prisoners started screaming as they alerted the police on duty that they were going to be burned alive, but the police refused to open the doors, saying "these are the orders we have received". The surroundings of the prison were blocked by a large deployment of soldiers and polices.

After this incident, information reaching us speaks of a secret burial to hide real numbers of victims estimated at hundreds, according to the same sources.

Faced with this situation, APRODH:

1. Sends its deepest condolences to the families of the victims, and promises them to follow this case closely until justice is done,
2. Deplores the late assistance from the authorities in charge of civil protection, because a first fire truck arrived two hours after the start of the incident, before being joined by six others from nearby provinces,
3. Deplores the lack of respect for the bodies of the deceased and their families, by secretly burying of the victims, without the families of the missing being concerted in order to say goodbye to their loved ones and organize dignified burials,

4. Regrets the overcrowded nature of Burundi's prisons, because Gitega prison had 1,539 detainees at the time of the incident, while its capacity is only 400,
5. Points out that the fact that the police refused to open the doors constitutes an offense of non-assistance to a person in danger as defined by the Burundian penal code,
6. Notes that the fact of refusing to open the prison doors by arguing that the orders were received from the hierarchical superiors constitutes a lead to investigate whether the fire was not premeditated,
7. Remind the Burundian authorities of their obligations to protect persons deprived of their liberty contained in the international instruments that Burundi has ratified,
8. Points out that the fact that the same fire had occurred in the same place in August 2021, and that no preventive measures were taken, constitutes a serious breach on the part of the managers of Gitega prison,
9. Calls for an independent and in-depth investigation into the origin of the fire which devastated Gitega prison and to establish the responsibilities of each other,
10. Alert the Government of Burundi on the dilapidation and lack of maintenance of all places of detention, and an incredible prison overcrowding in almost all prisons in Burundi,
11. Alert Burundi's key partners, in particular the ICRC, the Red Cross, diplomatic missions accredited to Burundi, NGOs working in / on Burundi on the seriousness of these hasty burials, which lack respect for the bodies of the victims and which would leave wounds in the memory of the families of the victims.

December 10th, 2021

Pierre -Claver Mbonimpa

President and Legal Representative of

L'APRODH

