



ACAT - Burundi

**Monitoring report on violations of the rights of persons deprived of
liberty**

April, May and June 2025

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I. INTRODUCTION

The situation of prisoners in Burundi remains very worrying. In several prisons across the country, such as Mpimba, Gitega, Ruyigi, Ngozi, Bururi and Muramvya, many serious problems continue to be observed. Prisoners are subjected to ill-treatment, lack adequate medical care and remain in detention without trial or even after serving their sentences. Food is often insufficient, and judicial proceedings are lengthy and unfair. This report summarises the facts observed in these places to highlight the difficulties faced by prisoners and call for urgent improvements.

II. INHUMAN AND DEGRADING TREATMENT

Detention facilities in Burundi continue to be a serious concern in terms of human rights. Cases reported between April and May 2025 reveal inhumane treatment, acts of extreme violence, arbitrary detention and violations of the dignity of persons deprived of their liberty. Dramatic individual cases highlight a prison system where impunity, neglect and lack of adequate care remain widespread.

By way of illustration:

1. On 13 April 2025, in Gitega, Jean Marie Hakizimana, 29, who was being held at the provincial police station, was shot dead in horrific circumstances. He had been given permission to go to the toilet but allegedly tried to escape. Police officer Evode Louis Niyonsaba shot him before finishing him off with a knife, according to his mother. Hakizimana had been charged with robbery but had not yet been tried. No assistance was provided to his family for the burial, no official statement was made, and the police officer responsible has not been punished or investigated to date, raising serious concerns about extrajudicial executions and police impunity.

2. The case of Innocent Ntirandekura, alias Rhamadan, from Cankuzo, highlights prolonged, illegal and inhumane detention. Arrested in 2022 in Tanzania on suspicion of collaborating with armed groups, he was transferred to Burundi without trial. After a spell in Gitega Central Prison, he was returned to the National Intelligence Service in Bujumbura on 28 March 2025, where he is being held in solitary confinement (as of the end of June 2025), without medical care despite obvious signs of severe physical deterioration (swollen legs, anaemia). His family has no visiting rights and no legal basis has been put forward to justify his detention. This constitutes cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, in violation of Burundian and international law.

3. In Bururi, in May 2025, another case raises concerns: Irankunda Eric, a detainee who is clearly suffering from serious mental disorders, is being held in an unsuitable prison environment without appropriate medical care. His condition is deteriorating, and his continued detention in a correctional facility without specialised care is denounced as inappropriate and degrading treatment, contrary to the principle of respect for human dignity.

In April 2025, ACAT-Burundi collected several testimonies, particularly in Gitega, reporting a slight improvement in the treatment of prisoners, in particular a reduction in physical violence. Old practices, such as beatings with truncheons for alleged espionage, appear to have ceased. However, the prolonged and unjustified detention of a prisoner in the provincial SNR premises is evidence of the persistence of certain forms of abusive treatment, albeit more discreet.

Here are a few examples:

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3. In Bururi, in May 2025, Iradukunda Eric, a detainee with obvious severe mental health issues, is being held in an unsuitable prison environment without proper medical care. His condition is deteriorating, and his continued detention in a correctional facility without specialised care is denounced as inappropriate and degrading treatment, contrary to the principle of respect for human dignity.

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III. ADEQUATE MEDICAL CARE IN PRISONS

Between April and June 2025, the issue of access to medical care in Burundi's prisons highlighted contrasting realities. While some provincial prisons showed gradual improvement, others continued to face serious shortcomings, putting the lives of prisoners at risk.

In April 2025, the situation appeared relatively stable in some provinces. In Ruyigi, medical care is considered accessible, with seriously ill prisoners able to be transferred to hospital.

In Muramvya, sick prisoners are also taken to hospital, but some shortcomings remain, including the lack of an ophthalmology service and psychological follow-up, while prisoners suffer from untreated mental disorders.

In Gitega, however, structural limitations are more visible: some political prisoners refuse medical transfers for fear of reprisals, and night-time care is difficult to organise due to double control of keys between the prison administration and the provincial intelligence service. Access to medication remains limited, compromising the medical follow-up of many detainees.

In May 2025, there were some modest improvements. At Mpimba prison, prisoners can now be transferred for medical care, marking a change from previous years when this was often refused.

In Bururi, despite the suspension of medicine supplies by the ICRC, healthcare continues as best it can. However, an alarming case has been reported to the Judicial Police in Ngozi, where a seriously ill detainee is being held on the floor without any assistance due to the unavailability of the prosecutor. This case illustrates the persistence of serious neglect in certain establishments, particularly police cells, where sanitary conditions are already considered deplorable.

In June 2025, tragic events highlighted the limitations of the system. In Mpimba, despite regular care for the sick, two detainees died from hepatitis that was not treated in time. They were Uwimana Fiston, who was serving a ten-year sentence and was due to be released in seven months, and another Muslim detainee named Juma. These deaths reignited concerns about the lack of systematic screening and follow-up for serious diseases, particularly hepatitis B and C.

In Gitega, healthcare is now considered accessible, but former detainees from the 2015 crisis remain subject to heightened surveillance. When they need to be transferred to hospital, they are often kept inside for fear of escape.

During the quarter from April to June 2025, although efforts were noted in some prisons, inequalities remained high. Administrative obstacles, security mistrust and a lack of adequate medical resources continued to hamper the effective care of sick prisoners, even leading to preventable deaths.

The situation highlights the urgent need to strengthen the prison health system, with respect for human dignity.

IV. ARBITRARY DETENTION

On 8 April 2025, in Makebuko (Gitega province), Désiré Hatungimana, a 32-year-old activist with the National Congress for Liberty (CNL) party, was arrested and arbitrarily detained as he was going to file a complaint at the local police station. He is accused by members of the Imbonerakure, including Emmanuel Ntibashirakandi, of organising illegal night meetings and possessing leaflets hostile to the president. Witnesses report a brutal arrest, without evidence, motivated by political considerations. According to the local chief, investigations are ongoing, but the Burundi Bwa Bose coalition has denounced this as a move to intimidate people ahead of the general elections on 5 June and is demanding the release of political detainees.

On 8 April 2025, Jérémy Manirakiza, secretary general of the Burundi Football Federation (FBF), was placed in pre-trial detention at Mpimba Central Prison in Bujumbura after his arrest on 27 March 2025 by the National Intelligence Service (SNR) on his return from Morocco. He is accused of expressing alleged support for the M23 rebel movement, active in eastern DRC, via a family WhatsApp group. Comments deemed hostile to President Évariste Ndayishimiye were also reportedly exchanged in this group.

On 17 April 2025, two activists from the opposition CNL party, Gatoni Thierry and Ndayishimiye Thierry, were arrested and placed in a cell at the Kayogoro police station in Makamba province. They are accused of distributing leaflets on behalf of an armed group, the Burundi Democracy Liberation Force (BDF-Abisezerano), criticising the president for his refusal to engage in dialogue with the opposition. This arrest is part of a wave of targeted repression against CNL members. Other activists, particularly in the Mugeni area, are being hunted down by the Imbonerakure, young people affiliated with the ruling party, under the orders of Marc Bigorimana and Pierre Nsabimana, and in collaboration with the local police. Three other people managed to escape.

On 27 April 2025, in the commune of Bugendana (Gitega province), a woman named Goreth Niyibizi, accompanied by her three-month-old baby, was held in a container used as a cell at the Mutoyi police station. She was reportedly arrested after her husband, who was involved in a motorcycle accident that injured a civilian, fled. There are no official charges or judicial decisions justifying her detention, raising concerns about legality and respect for human rights. While the local population and authorities, including the head of the Cishwa hill, are calling for her release, the police cite an ongoing investigation to

justify her continued detention. The case highlights degrading conditions of detention, the abusive use of preventive detention and the lack of safeguards for women and children in police custody.

On 21 May 2025, it was reported that Pierre Nkurunziza, who was arrested in April 2016 in Musaga when he was only 20 years old, is still being held at Mpimba Central Prison. However, a release order had been issued in his favour on 30 May 2016 by the High Court, without any appeal being lodged against this decision. Sources indicate that the case file was deliberately concealed by the former prison director, Colonel Serges Nibigira, preventing the execution of the court decision. After nine years of deprivation of liberty without trial, this situation constitutes a flagrant case of arbitrary detention and demonstrates a serious dysfunction of the Burundian judicial system.

On 5 July 2025, at Gitega Central Prison, an Imbonerakure employee, Jean NDUWIMANA, was caught with drugs. Despite the seizure, he was not punished. However, the head of security, Alfred Batazira, who had ordered the search, was imprisoned. All prison activities were suspended. Prisoners denounce the impunity and demand Alfred's release and Jean's punishment. This case illustrates arbitrary detention and flagrant impunity with .

V. FOOD SITUATION IN PRISONS

Data collected in several provincial prisons in Burundi during this quarter reveal an alarming food situation in some localities, marked by shortages, poor quality rations and discriminatory practices. While some prisons are relatively stable, others are experiencing critical irregularities, mainly affecting the most vulnerable prisoners, particularly those without external support.

For example:

✓ April 2025

Gitega Prison: The situation is considered worrying. A shortage of beans lasted for more than a week. No meals were distributed on 15 April, and the following days were marked by random food distribution (sometimes flour alone, sometimes poor-quality beans). Prisoners fear serious health consequences.

Ngozi Prison: No food shortages, but a problem with cooking beans due to a lack of firewood has been reported.

Ruyigi Prison: Since 20 April, a lack of firewood has prevented cooking. On 28 April, fallen trees were burned to make up for the shortage, but rations are still considered inadequate.

✓ **May 2025**

Mpimba Prison (Bujumbura City Hall): Since 20 April 2025, beans have not been distributed due to a lack of wood. On 28 May, makeshift solutions allowed for minimal cooking. The situation remains poor despite some isolated improvements.

Bururi Prison: Slight overall improvement. Cassava flour is available, although sometimes mixed with sand. Beans are in very poor condition and are sometimes thrown away. Inequalities in the use of agricultural land in the prison have been reported, benefiting certain groups (security forces).

✓ **June 2025**

Gitega Prison: Rations were distributed in accordance with the planned quantities, no positive changes, but no major deterioration reported.

Mpimba Prison: Situation stabilised. Firewood became available again from 17 June, allowing for regular distribution of beans. Rations remain low but available.

Between April and June 2025, several prisons in Burundi faced major difficulties in food supply, particularly Gitega, Mpimba and Ruyigi, mainly due to a lack of beans and firewood.

Other facilities, such as Ngozi and Bururi, experienced more stable conditions, although quality and internal management issues persist. The deterioration of prison food raises serious health and humanitarian concerns, compounded by the lack of explanation or effective intervention by prison authorities.

VI. PROCEDURAL AND JUDICIAL ISSUES IN PRISONS

During the period from April to June 2025, data collected in several prisons in Burundi revealed deep-rooted judicial problems, marked by procedural delays, administrative blockages and persistent politicisation of detention. Despite some positive initiatives in certain regions, the majority of prisons continue to face serious shortcomings in the processing of judicial cases, severely affecting the fundamental rights of prisoners.

In April 2025, several prisons were already reporting serious malfunctions.

In Muramvya, people convicted on political grounds remain in prolonged detention without trial or release, despite the exhaustion of legal remedies.

In Gitega, political cases that have been tried have not resulted in any concrete decisions, leaving detainees in prolonged uncertainty.

However, in Ruyigi, there is a glimmer of hope with the arrival of a commission from the Ministry of Justice, equipped with computers, which is questioning prisoners about their entire judicial history. This initiative appears to be more structured and inclusive, although its concrete effects remain to be confirmed.

In May 2025, the situation deteriorated in several facilities.

In Mpimba, no commission showed up, and when they did, they refused to comment. The administrative deadlock is becoming apparent: prisoners who have served their sentences are not being released, particularly those accused of political offences (such as undermining internal state security). Releases are now subject to a rigid chain of command, with the prison director awaiting approval from the prosecutor, who in turn reports to the Attorney General.

In Bururi, the situation is more mixed: while a local prosecutor regularly releases prisoners for minor offences, the appeal court prosecutor continues to order arbitrary detentions, even for cases that have been dismissed. Prisoners there clearly express their despair and call for action on behalf of those serving long sentences.

In June 2025, the blockades persist.

In Mpimba, no commission has yet been dispatched. Judicial inaction is exacerbated by an electoral and festive context that is mobilising the authorities, relegating legal matters to the background. Access to the courts is becoming difficult, even for witnesses summoned to appear. Judges appear to be waiting for mission expenses to be paid before ruling, which raises suspicions of corruption and further delays decisions.

In Gitega, no progress has been made, particularly for political prisoners. Former prisoners remain incarcerated at the sole discretion of the Attorney General, without any new legal basis.

VII. PRISON OVERCROWDING

Prison overcrowding remains a serious structural problem. Despite a few targeted releases, particularly in Bururi and Ngozi, efforts remain insufficient given the scale of the problem. In Ruyigi, the situation is particularly critical, with the prison population exceeding several times the intended capacity. Detention conditions remain characterised by overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and lack of care, compromising the dignity of prisoners and highlighting the urgent need for sustainable prison reforms.

 April 2025

Prisons	Capacity	Total of prisoners	Number of defendants	Number of convicted prisoners	Excess percentage
Bubanza	200	343 with 5 infants	1	2	171.50
Bururi	25	189 with 2 Infants	156	3	75.60
Gitega	40	1,176 with 13 Infants	629	547	294.00
Mpimba	80	3705 with 12 infants	2261	1,444	463.13
Muramvya	10	779 with 4 infants	367	412	779.00
Muyinga	300	513 with 6 infants	128	385	171.00
Ngozi	650	1,678 with 12 minors and 15 infants	572	1,094	443.20
Rumonge	80	1,348 with 1 infant	443	905	168.50
Rutana	35	371 with 2 Infants	166	2	106.00
Ruyigi	30	675 with 7 Infants	324	3	225

- The prison population in April 2025 was **10,927** prisoners + **67** infants = **10,994**.
- The total number of defendants is **5,189 adults** + **65** minors = **5,254**.
- The total number of convicted prisoners is **5,576** adults + **97** minors = **5,673**.

In the 10 prisons in the ACAT-Burundi area of operation, the prison population is **10,777**, with a capacity of **4,150** prisoners.

 **May 2025**

Prisons	Capacity	Number Total number of prisoners	Number of defendants	Number convicted prisoners	of Excess percentage
Bubanza	200	347 with 5 infants	141	206	173.50
Bururi	250	254 with 3 Infants	156	9	101.60
Gitega	40	1,183 with 14 Infants	467	716	295.75
Mpimba	80	3,764 with 13 Infants	233	1,432	470.50
Muramvya	10	781 with 5 Infants	359	422	781.00
Muyinga	30	519 with 6 Infants	139	380	173.00
Ngozi	65	1,736 with 13 minors and 13 infants	620	110	458.9
Rumonge	80	1,386 with 1 infant	486	90	173.25
Rutana	350	381 with 1 Infants	170	2	108.86
Ruyigi	30	675 with 5 Infants	317	358	225.00

- The population prison at month in May 2025 was of **11,175 prisoners + 66 infants = 11,241.**
- The total number of defendants is **5,187 adults + 68 minors = 5,255.**
- The total number of convicted prisoners is **5,826 adults + 944 minors = 5,920.**

In the 10 prisons in the ACAT-Burundi area of operation, the prison population is **11,026**, with a capacity of **4,150** prisoners.

 June 2025

Prisons	Capacity	Total number of Prisoners	Number of Prisoners	Number of convicted prisoners	Exceeded in Percentage
Bubanza	200	350 with 5 Infants	140	110	175
Bururi	25	280 with 3 Infants	175	1	112.00
Gitega	40	1,200 with 15 Infants	479	721	300
Mpimba	80	3855 with 14 Infants	2,203	1652	481.88
Muramvya	10	791 with 6 Infants	371	420	791.00
Muyinga	300	512 with 4 Infants	129	383	170.67
Ngozi	650	1,762 with 13 minors and 17 infants	644	1,105	466.3
Rumonge	800	1,384 with 1 Infant	493	891	173.00
Rutana	350	399 with 1 Infants	188	2	114.00
Ruyigi	3	678 with 3 Infants	316	3	226.00

- The prison population in June 2025 was **11,368 prisoners + 69 infants = 11,437**.
- The total number of defendants is **5,138 adults + 77 minors = 5,145**.
- The total number of prisoners is **5,960 adults + 6 minors = 5,215**
- In the 10 prisons in the ACAT-Burundi area of operation, the prison population is **11,211**, with a capacity of **4,150** prisoners.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Prisoners' rights continue to be violated in prisons, where the administration responsible for their protection is accused of participating in these violations.

Prisoners with beliefs opposed to the ruling party are particularly targeted by its supporters, who monitor them and subject them to inhuman and degrading treatment.

In addition, there are reports of denial of healthcare, exacerbating the suffering of prisoners.

This situation is exacerbated by prison overcrowding, creating unbearable living conditions for those incarcerated.

ACAT-Burundi strongly condemns the exclusion and ongoing harassment of prisoners, a situation that has been regularly denounced.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Burundi:

- ✓ Improve detention conditions by taking measures to reduce prison overcrowding and treat prisoners equally.
- ✓ To arrest and bring to justice the perpetrators of human rights violations in general and those of prisoners in particular,
- ✓ Respect the rights of prisoners recognised by national and international law, especially the right to health, which is often violated, causing irreparable harm.

To international organisations and the international community:

- ✓ Continue to support initiatives to promote human rights in Burundi,
- ✓ Support actions to consolidate peace and security,
- ✓ Keep a watchful eye on Burundi and remind the government to respect its commitments on human rights, security and the guarantee of peace and reconciliation.