



Brussels, April 6th 2011

Press release and invitation to the screening of:

“Justice for Ernest Manirumva”

A documentary by Protection International in memory of a Burundian human rights defender.

On April 9th 2009, Ernest Manirumva, number two at OLUCOME, Burundi’s main association in the fight against corruption, was stabbed to death at his home.

Two years later, Burundian civil society laments that the justice system still struggles to shed light on the assassination, and “there are still gaps in the investigation”¹.

The need for additional investigations and the reopening of the trial are the core demands raised by civil society, which was deeply shocked by Ernest Manirumva’s assassination. The international community, for its part, feared that the crime would be the first of a long list of acts of violence, making it practically impossible for Burundian defenders to pursue their activities. “The assassination was clearly organised”, said Jozef Smets, the Belgian Ambassador in Bujumbura, who has been following the legal twists and turns of the Manirumva case for two years.

Shortly after the crime, FORSC, the Forum for the Strengthening of Civil Society, rallied its 146 member associations to launch the “Justice for Ernest Manirumva” campaign. Several defenders then received death threats.

In March 2010, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, president of the Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (APRODH), Gabriel Rufyiri, president of OLUCOME, were informed that state agents were planning to kill one of them and disguise the crime as a car accident. In November 2009, Pacifique Nininahazwe, a member of FORSC, was warned of a plot being developed to kill him. The Ministry of Internal Affairs later gave a ruling banning FORSC.² Following international pressure, the Minister “suspended” the ruling, and it was not until 28th January 2011 that FORSC finally was released from its legal vacuum.

To support the demand for justice for Ernest Manirumva and for protection for Burundian human rights defenders, Protection International launches a 26 minute documentary today at: <http://vimeo.com/21979402>³

Human rights defenders in Burundi have kept the Manirumva case on the national and international political agenda. In cooperation with Protection International and with the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), defenders are developing their own security and protection mechanisms in order to face the threats and pressures they are subjected to as a result of this campaign.

¹ Declaration of the Civil Society organizations, 22 months after the assassination of Ernest Manirumva.

² Amnesty International, Activists express their solidarity with the campaign “Justice for Ernest Manirumva, <http://www.amnesty.lu/spip/spip.php?article4437>

³ <http://vimeo.com/21988170> (lower quality)

Since 2010, a number of Belgian MPs have been supporting Burundian defenders in danger through a “twinning” programme. The Senate and House of Representatives are regularly informed of the problems encountered by Burundian defenders for their human rights work, and they are following the developments in the Manirumva case. The Belgian development cooperation is also funding reform of the justice sector.

Protection International, FORSC and EHAHRDP recall the commitments made by:

- The Delegation of the European Commission and the Member States of the EU to **make public their local strategy for the protection of Burundian defenders**, in accordance with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, a foreign policy priority since 2004;
- The Human Rights department of the United Nations Office in Burundi to **contribute to the development of a legal framework for the protection of human rights defenders by the Parliament of Burundi**. Several Burundian elected representatives, including the president of the Justice and Human Rights Commission (a member of the ruling party CNDD-FDD), have demanded that light be shed on the assassination of Ernest Manirumva, and have committed themselves to set up a legal framework for the protection of human rights defenders.

Protection International, FORSC and EHAHRDP consider it essential that the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights strengthens its programme of protection of human rights defenders in Burundi, reminding in particular the Burundian State of its responsibility to protect defenders in accordance with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by consensus on December 9th 1998.

The documentary will be projected on Friday April 8th at 11 AM in the Rotunda 1 of the Belgian Federal Parliament, rue de Louvain / Leuvenseweg 21, 1000 Brussels, with support of Mr. Dirk Van der Maelen MP, counterpart of the general delegate of the FORSC, Mr. Pacifique Nininahazwe, in the patronage programme.

The film will also be projected on Friday at 6 PM in Bujumbura, at the former Novotel.

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