

THE CALL OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE RELEASE OF THE BURUNDIAN JOURNALIST ALINE SANDRA MUHOZA



THE GOVERNMENT OF BURUNDI SHOULD IMMEDIATELY AND UNCONDITIONALLY RELEASE THE JOURNALIST ALINE SANDRA MUHOZA IN ARBITRARY DETENTION SINCE APRIL 13, 2024



Aline Sandra Muhoza, Burundian Journalist in arbitrary detention

February 28, 2025

The undersigned organizations are deeply concerned by the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the lockdown of civic space in Burundi. The Journalist Sandra Muhoza, arbitrarily detained since April 13, 2024, is one of the many victims of this dramatic situation. The undersigned organizations appeal for her release.

It is worth mentioning that the principles of equitable justice, respect for judicial procedures and the law without any discrimination, independence of the judiciary, impartiality of the magistrate and legality no longer serve as bases for governance in Burundi even though the State has adopted and ratified several international instruments relating to the protection and promotion of human rights.

Hence, acts of arbitrary arrests, kidnappings and forced disappearances have become commonplace, especially against members of opposition parties, human rights defenders, journalists and other citizens considered as such. These practices have intensified since 2015, with the political crisis that erupted with the third term of the late President Pierre Nkurunziza.

By this Declaration, the signatory organizations deplore the conditions in which Sandra Muhoza was arrested and held in detention, which clearly demonstrate the extent to which the judiciary has become a tool for persecuting all voices that disagree with the ruling regime. This represents a serious threat to the freedom of the press and that of expression in Burundi.

Sandra Muhoza was kidnapped on April 13, 2024 by a businessman named Marc Manirakiza, alias Pochen, resident in the city of Ngozi, who called to tell her that he wanted to give her a scoop and that he wanted her to cover the news herself. Arriving at the venue agreed upon with her tormentor, Aline Sandra Muhoza was handed over to the agents of the National Intelligence Service (SNR) of Ngozi and was immediately taken to an unknown location. The next day, she was transferred to the SNR headquarters in Bujumbura.

The SNR invented a grotesque accusation against Aline Sandra Muhoza, namely: "Attack on the integrity of the national territory" and "Racial aversion" for having made a comment in a WhatsApp group of journalists from various local media called "Burundi media".

Sandra Muhoza's comments concerned respectively a 1996 audiovisual shared by one of her colleagues on social networks where "the Burundian Minister of Defense at the time made comments relating to the crisis that was prevailing in the country" and "probable containers of machetes that were allegedly imported by the government of Burundi", which was making headlines in Burundi.

Furthermore, the offence of attacking the integrity of the national territory is one reason often used to repress opponents, journalists and human rights defenders as no one can imagine that a simple citizen who just expresses himself can be committing such a serious offence.

The Journalist Muhoza's arrest and detention were characterized by inhuman and degrading treatment and numerous judicial irregularities. In particular, she was arrested without a warrant and arbitrarily detained in violation of the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure. In addition, she was deprived of any assistance of a lawyer during her police custody, detained far from her place of residence and prosecuted by a territorially incompetent jurisdiction.

Detained at the central prison of Mpimba/Burundi since April 19, 2024, Sandra Muhoza appeared on April 22, 2024 before the investigating magistrate who placed her under warrant of arrest on the basis of the two aforementioned charges. As of that day, she is being held at the central prison of Mpimba in Bujumbura. Furthermore, during a hearing before the Judge on May 10, 2024, she was put in preventive detention, a decision confirmed by the Court of Appeal on June 7, 2024.

On November 12, 2024, Sandra Muhoza appeared before the High Court of Mukaza (territorially incompetent) and the Public Prosecutor requested a 10-year prison sentence for “attacking the integrity of the national territory” and a fine of one million Burundian francs (approximately 350 euros) as well as a 2-year prison sentence for “racial aversion”.

On December 16, 2024, in violation of the time limits provided by the law, the Mukaza High Court sentenced Sandra Muhoza to one and a half year (1 year and 6 months) of imprisonment for “attacking the integrity of the national territory” and to a sentence of 3 months detention for “racial aversion”. Based on this unfair sentence, Sandra Muhoza introduced an appeal and on March 4, 2025, she will appear before the Mukaza Court of Appeal, once again a territorially incompetent jurisdiction according to the law.

It is worth emphasizing that this abusive deprivation of liberty against Aline Sandra Muhoza is a flagrant violation of international instruments regularly ratified by Burundi, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which stipulates that: "No one shall be arbitrarily arrested, detained or exiled (Article 9) and that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" (Article 3). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) stipulating in its Article 9.1 that "Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention."

Furthermore, these international provisions for the promotion and protection of human rights are integrated into the Constitution of the Republic of Burundi in its article 19 which stipulates that: “The rights and duties proclaimed and guaranteed by the international instruments relating to human rights regularly ratified are an integral part of the Constitution”

In view of the above, the undersigned organizations demand the immediate and unconditional release of the journalist Sandra Muhoza, who has been unjustly imprisoned, and recommend the following:

1. **To the Government of Burundi:** to end the harassment of journalists, opponents, human rights defenders and citizens presumed as such, in order to restore the civic space where the rights and freedoms of opinion and expression are guaranteed in accordance with the Burundian constitution and other international instruments binding Burundi.
2. To the Burundi justice system, to use impartiality, to apply the law and pronounce the immediate and unconditional release of the journalist Aline Sandra Muhoza, in accordance with Article 60 of the Constitution, which establishes the judiciary as the guardian of citizens' rights and freedoms.
3. To the national and international human rights organizations to continue their joint action to defend human rights and advocate for the immediate and unconditional release of the journalist Aline Sandra Muhoza, arbitrarily detained since April 13, 2024.

The Signatory organizations

1. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT – Belgique)
2. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture au Burundi (ACAT Burundi)
3. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT – Suisse)
4. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT – France)
5. Association Burundaise pour la Protection des Droits de l'Homme et des Personnes Détenues (APRODH)
6. Coalition Burundaise des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme (CBDDH)
7. Coalition pour la Défense des Droits Humains Vivant dans les Camps de Réfugiés (CDH/VICAR)
8. Coalition Burundaise pour la Cour Pénale Internationale (CB-CPI)
9. Coalition de la Société Civile pour le Monitoring Electoral (COSOME)
10. Collectif des Avocats pour la défense des Victimes de crimes de droit international commis au Burundi (CAVIB)
11. CNCD 11 11 11
12. DefendDefenders (Projet pour les défenseurs des droits de l'homme en Afrique de l'Est et de la Corne de l'Afrique)
13. Ensemble pour le Soutien des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Danger (ESDDH)
14. Fédération Internationale des ACAT (FIACAT)
15. Forum pour la Conscience et de Développement (FOCODE)
16. Forum pour le Renforcement de la Société Civile au Burundi (FORSC)
17. Light for All
18. Ligue Iteka
19. Mouvement INAMAHORO
20. Mouvement des Femmes et Filles pour la Paix et la Sécurité au Burundi (MFFPS)
21. Réseau des Citoyens Probes (RCP)
22. SOS-Torture Burundi
23. Tournons la Page Burundi