

Brussels, 26 April 2018

Statement

Protection International strongly condemns the wrongful conviction to 32 years in prison for human rights defender Germain Rukuki of Burundi

Today, Germain Rukuki, human rights defender in Burundi, was found guilty of charges of “rebellion”, “attempt to the security of the State”, “participation in an insurrectionist movement” and sentenced to **32 years in prison** by the Ntahangwa High Court in Burundi. The decision of the court to impose a harsh verdict on Germain Rukuki is a notable miscarriage of justice and the result of the unlawful criminalisation Germain has experienced since he was arrested in Bujumbura in July 2017.

Initially kept in the SNR facilities without access to a lawyer, Germain was transferred to the Ngozi prison in July 2017. In August 2017, he was first charged with “rebellion” and “breach of the security of the State” for working with ACAT-Burundi, a human rights organisation closed down by the government in 2016. After a 6 months long pre-trial phase, three more charges were added during the first hearing on 13 February 2018: “assassinations”, “destruction of public and private buildings” and “participation in an insurrectionist movement”. Germain appeared before court for the second and last time on 3 April 2018 and finally sentenced today, despite the fact that prosecution failed to present at trial concrete and convincing evidence.

Protection International denounces the loss of freedom and wrongful conviction of Germain Rukuki as an unjust attack against his peaceful human rights work and as part of a deliberate and continuous attempt of Burundian authorities to silence and criminalise the exercise of the right to defend human rights in the country. On August 25th 2017, a group of [UN experts called for the release of Germain](#), and expressed their concern that national security charges were used to target the legitimate exercise of human rights contributing to “an overall context of threats and harassment against human rights defenders”.

Protection International calls on Burundian authorities to reverse and remedy the unlawful conviction of Germain Rukuki and recognise the legitimacy of the human rights work of all defenders currently unlawfully criminalised in Burundi.