

Protection International and Germain Rukuki Finally Come Together, Four Months after His Judicial Victory

As PI celebrates our friend's newfound freedom, we wish to express our deepest gratitude to all individuals and organisations that supported us in advocating for the Burundian Human Rights Defender's release.

[Brussels, 22 October 2021] – Four months after Germain Rukuki's judicial victory, Protection International is glad to meet the Burundian human rights defender and celebrate our friend's newfound freedom.

At the time of his arrest in 2017, Germain Rukuki was an employee at *Association des Juristes Catholiques du Burundi* (AJCB) as part of a joint project between Protection International and AJCB. In 2015, Germain received training by Protection International on protection management for Human Rights Defenders as part of an old partnership with ACAT-Burundi, before the Burundian government closed down the latter.

“Germain has been constantly in our minds and hearts, as his arrest and imprisonment have been an incredibly painful experience for us all these past years,” said Alice Nah, Chairperson of Protection International's Global Board. “We have been monitoring the development of his case closely and we have strived hard to advocate for his release.”

Words cannot express the joy we feel that he is now a free man, and is living safely in Belgium. In 2018, Germain was unjustly sentenced to 32-years in prison, one of the longest sentences ever handed down to a Burundian Human Rights Defenders. His detention and 3-decade long sentencing tore Germain away from his wife and young children. Now, as a free man, he can be reunited with his family after more than four years

apart. This reunification has always been a priority for Protection International, one that is happening much sooner than anticipated.

Protection International wishes to express our deepest gratitude for the crucial actions taken over the last four years by all individuals and organisations to support Germain Rukuki's liberation. From his arrest in July 2017 to his release in June 2021, many people have advocated steadfastly for his release. Had it not been for these collective efforts, Germain may not be the free man that he is today.

“Germain's release sends a powerful reminder to all defenders in Burundi and across the African continent. The defence of human rights is a legitimate endeavour. The work of human rights defenders has value, and they have the right to defend human rights,” adds Alice Nah.

His story also clearly illustrates how the hard work to release unfairly imprisoned defenders, a collective endeavour in itself, is part of an impressive and indispensable collective effort to protect human rights defenders.

His verdict is also a step in the right direction for the country. Nevertheless, the fate of other imprisoned human rights defenders must not be forgotten: may what was done for him, also be done for other voiceless victims. With every liberation of an innocent person, every innocent activist, the right to enjoy fundamental rights returns in Burundi and across Africa.