



PRESS RELEASE
ACAT-FRANCE

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Press release

ACAT-Burundi Awarded 2020 Engel-du Tertre Human Rights Prize

ACAT Burundi, which was suspended in 2015 before being banned a year later, continues to endure regime repression against civil society organisations whose work in defense of human rights is being criminalized. As a sign of recognition for its commitment, the Burundi-based NGO is being honored by the ACAT Foundation for human dignity with the 7th Engel-du Tertre Human Rights Prize.

On Thursday 18 November, Action by Christians Against Torture of Burundi (ACAT-Burundi) will be represented by its President, Mr Armel Niyongere, before donors of the ACAT Foundation which bestows this award. Mr Armel Niyongere is a Burundian lawyer who has been sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment and is a first-hand witness of the Burundi government's hostility against human rights defenders in the country.

ACAT-Burundi is a non-profit organization committed to defending the right to human dignity, which has led it to work against torture, capital punishment, enforced disappearances, degrading conditions of detention and sexual violence. ACAT-Burundi was first suspended in 2015 then banned at the end of 2016, and is no longer allowed to operate in the country. Its staff had no choice but to seek exile abroad to flee persecutions, including heavy sentences and confiscation of their property, which deprive them of any hope of return in the near future.

Threats, arrests and disappearances are frustrating human rights defenders' work in defending and promoting fundamental freedoms. Burundi was ravaged by civil war in the 1990s, and has since gradually sunk into severe repression by the regime. This increased when then President Pierre Nkunjiza violated the peace agreements to run for an illegal third term. This resulted in ACAT-Burundi's deregistration, a sentence which has also been imposed to many other organizations and media.

The European Union froze its financial support as a response to unpunished human rights violations, yet this sanction is believed to be lifted soon. France has already resumed its bilateral cooperation with Burundi.

More than ever, this award underlines the dire necessity for France to not replace human rights diplomacy with realpolitik in the Great Lakes region. The protection of human rights defenders requires an uncompromising stand.

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