



PETITION FROM MR. TELESPORE KAREKEZI AND FOUR OTHER
PRISONERS AT USUMBURA
CONCERNING RUANDA-URUNDI

Note by the Secretary-General: In accordance with rule 84 and supplementary rule F of the rules of procedure for the Trusteeship Council, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the Trusteeship Council and to the Government of Italy as the Administering Authority of the Trust Territory of Somaliland, an undated communication from Mr. Telespore Karekezi and four other prisoners at Usumbura concerning the Trust Territory of Ruanda-Urundi.

This communication was transmitted to the Secretary-General by the United Nations Visiting Mission to Trust Territories in East Africa.

C O P Y

United Nations Visiting Mission to Ruanda-Urundi

United Nations

New York, United States of America

Gentlemen:

Taking advantage of your visit, we wish to complain to your distinguished mission of the unjust and inhumane treatment to which we are subject. We shall confine ourselves to legal proceedings, both administrative and judicial.

1. We have noticed on numerous occasions that the white accuser is never given the lie. If an employer should miss objects or money and should suspect one or several of his employees, he will make them appear before the competent authority. The latter, during interrogation, will use all possible means of torture to make the black confess. The more he insists on his innocence, the more he will be struck in the face and on the body, the more needles will be stuck into him, and so on... until he is forced to confess and to clear the white man of lying. He is constantly told that "a white man cannot lie".

2. When, under constant torture, he has confessed to the police, he will be brought to the public prosecutor's office, before the King's deputy-prosecutor. He will then try to explain his case, confident that he is addressing an official of higher rank and therefore more just; he will say that he confessed only because he had been beaten. But the poor black's efforts are vain, he will be remanded in custody and will spend months in prison, and sometimes a whole year, before his case is settled. Thus the white accuser will have won even if the court should find the Negro innocent, since the Negro will have been imprisoned pending trial, and for all that time spent in work and suffering he will not be paid. If he demands payment he is sure to go back to prison and this time to have to deal with the Government.

3. There have been cases of otitis resulting from prisoners' ear drums being punctured as a result of blows in an effort to make them confess. These poor people are still suffering from it, and an ear is not a thing that can be bought in a shop for cash. To cite only two cases of prisoners who are appealing, Teresphore Karekezi and Jean Sebukwavu have had their ear drums punctured as a result of blows.

/4. You

4. You yourselves must have noticed that when you were received great care had been taken to clean all the premises, to dress the prisoners decently, and to make the kitchen sanitary... and all that for the sake of making a good impression on visitors who would be gone in a week's time. The children of from 12 to 15 years of age who were remanded in custody or convicted had to be concealed, and the aged were persuaded to go to a hospital so that you would not notice them. These poor children, victims of adults and powerless to defend themselves in law, are not merely imprisoned but obliged to live with criminals from whom they will acquire bad habits and learn things which are better left unsaid... It is in prison, in a den of vice, that our children, our future, must spend their youth. Those who govern us must, however, realize that this is a crime, for they hid or transferred them before your visit.

5. We come now to punishments. A policeman, if he is spiteful, or if a poor prisoner is unable to pay him, has but a word to say and the Governor of the prison will have the poor wretch flogged. No attempt will be made to discover whether he has been accused rightly or wrongly. He will be flogged without a word of explanation. The general rule is that remanded prisoners and debtors should not be flogged, but some that had been flogged so hard that they had open wounds on their buttocks were removed to the hospital on the day of your visit.

We hope that wherever you went, you met men who dared to call your attention to cases of injustice; for merely to speak of them is a crime which deserves whatever reprisals the Belgians are able to take. If in important councils and conferences you are told that we are too immature for progress and that we have many defects, it is because most white men come here to grow rich and not to civilize us. Until now we can be truly grateful only to our religious missions, for there alone do we see love and concern for the indigenous inhabitant. Yet even there the Government will try to discriminate against the Negro. It will do all it can to keep us in prison in order to have unpaid labour, while the worthy missionaries try to impart learning and morals to us. Some white men presume to tell us that the priest and the clergyman merely make us chant lies prepared for the blacks, which seems to us contradictory. But to you they will write a good report.

/In conclusion,

In conclusion, we thank you for your visit and hope that you will take a just decision on our fate. In our helplessness, we have only you to appeal to for a just government. We greet you and remain your obedient servants.

Several prisoners of Usumbura
(signed) Karekezi and four
illegible signatures