

# Achieving Countrywide Rights Awareness in Burundi

*IBJ creates positive change through knowledge*

*IBJ employs a comprehensive approach to rights awareness in order to reach every level of the criminal justice system.*

In 2010, IBJ bolstered its legal rights movement in Burundi through the addition of two new Legal Fellows to support the day-to-day operations of its Bujumbura-based DRC and by continuing to conduct hands-on training across the nation. In addition, IBJ's rights-awareness efforts significantly contributed to an inspiring 45% increase in overall media coverage of criminal justice matters, and its operational support facilitated a 13% increase in the total number of IBJ-trained lawyers dedicating at least half of their practice to criminal law.

IBJ employs a comprehensive approach to rights aware-

ness in order to reach every level of the criminal justice system. In 2010 alone, IBJ reached over 4,000 ordinary citizens during five Street Law campaigns, in which residents of the areas around Cibitoke, Kabezi, Rumonge, Kinama, and Gitega received one-on-one education about their rights in case of arrest. Over 130 detainees in Bubanza, Ngozi, and Gitega provinces also received desperately needed rights-awareness training through IBJ's "Know Your Rights" programs. Participants immediately felt the impact of this training: 98% of IBJ-program participants indicated awareness of their right to legal representation

and 86% were aware of their right not to be tortured.

IBJ also achieved great successes in its efforts to reshape the practices and policies of the criminal justice community. Through a mock-trial training with over 61 lawyers, judges, prosecutors, police officers, and prison directors, IBJ helped to increase systematic understanding of detainee rights and contributed to a 60% overall increase in access of lawyers to their clients in police custody. Additionally, IBJ's efforts to combat prison overcrowding with the rallying cry, "Freedom is the rule; detention is the exception," led to a drastic shift in Bu-

## JUSTICE FACTS: Burundi

**Rule of Law:** 11.8/100

**2010 Prison Population:**  
9,844,  
114 per 100,000



Participants in a criminal justice roundtable event at Rutana, Burundi



Burundian lawyer Sylvestre Ngendakuriyo



Military Court judges at a Burundi criminal defense skills training

rundi's detention policy. (See accompanying story.)

IBJ also held various roundtable discussions, bringing judges and prosecutors together with other important participants in the criminal justice sector to discuss a range of issues. These roundtables facilitated the representation of hundreds of vulnerable detainees in

the provinces of Bujumbura, Bubanza, and Bururi.

With the goal of increasing both the scope and depth of coverage throughout Burundi, IBJ will continue its inclusive countrywide awareness and training campaign in 2011, while solidifying ties with the government and Ministry of Justice.

*“Freedom is the rule; detention is the exception.”*

On March 24, 2010, President Pierre Nkurunziza ordered the immediate release of hundreds of prisoners from Burundi's overcrowded prisons. The decree targeted several categories of detainees, including pregnant and breast-feeding women, juveniles, and prisoners over sixty years old. A presidential spokesperson announced the decree over public radio using a slogan previously used during IBJ rights-awareness campaigns: Freedom is the rule; detention is the exception.

Prior to this decree, Burundi's prisons were extremely overcrowded, with 11,000 people incarcerated despite a maximum capacity of 4,050. This overcrowding was exacerbated by many pretrial detainees spending months, if not years, awaiting trial in violation of detention limits. Operating at more than double their capacity, prisons were unable to meet the basic medical, legal, and social needs of inmates.

The release came after many IBJ roundtable discussions on prison overcrowding in 2009 and early 2010. During a roundtable on pretrial detention in Rumonge, participants suggested a mass release of detainees as an appropriate way to address this problem.

This decree is a resounding success for the criminal justice system and human rights in Burundi. Moreover, it appears to indicate a growing governmental consciousness of the need to uphold criminal procedures and safeguard the rights of the accused.



IBJ Fellow Astère Muyango at a Burundi criminal defense skills training