

A former Prime Minister of Burundi, Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni, wanted for several days by the courts without the authorities communicating the reasons, has been arrested, announced on Saturday the National Independent Commission for Human Rights (CNIDH) and a senior security official.

Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni, who had been Prime Minister since June 2020, was removed from office on September 7 by President Evariste Ndayishimiye and replaced by Interior Minister Gervais Ndirakobuca.

Five days earlier, the Head of State had denounced in a speech the desire for a "coup d'état" on the part of those who believe themselves "almighty" and are trying to "sabotage" his action.

Mr Bunyoni had long been seen as the regime's true number two since the political crisis of 2015 and the leader of the hardliners among the generals working behind the scenes of power.

The National Independent Human Rights Commission made a visit on Saturday "to meet with General Alain Guillaume Bunyoni. He is doing well. He has not suffered any act of torture or any other abuse since his arrest", said the CNIDH in a tweet.

Burundi's Interior Minister, Martin Niteretse, announced at a press conference on Wednesday that Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni was wanted by the courts and that several searches had been carried out without being able to locate him, claiming to ignore the reasons of these operations.

"In reality, General Bunyoni was arrested very quickly by the National Intelligence Service," a senior security official told AFP, who requested anonymity.

Since the end of a civil war which ravaged the country between 1993 and 2006 and claimed 300,000 lives, the country has been held in an iron grip by the regime, thanks to the Imbonerakure, the youth league of the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, and the National Intelligence Service.

While the international community has welcomed a certain openness in the country since Evariste Ndayishimiye came to power in June 2020 after the sudden death of Pierre Nkurunziza, a UN commission of inquiry affirmed in September 2021 that the human rights situation remained "disastrous" in Burundi.

Since its independence in 1962, Burundi has been the scene of numerous

massacres and conflicts between the Hutu and Tutsi communities, respectively estimated at 85% and 14% of its population.

Burundi, landlocked in the Great Lakes region, is the poorest country in the world in terms of GDP per capita according to the World Bank, which estimates that 75% of its twelve million inhabitants live below the poverty line.