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<http://www.rsf.org/rwanda-radio-journalist-gets-25-years-on-02-03-2015,47638.html>

Africa - Rwanda

Disproportionate sentence

Radio journalist gets 25 years on conspiracy charges

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Reporters Without Borders is appalled to learn that a Kigali court has sentenced religious radio station director Cassien Ntamuhanga to 25 years in prison for allegedly conspiring against the government.

Cassien Ntamuhanga, who ran *Amazing Grace* radio, was convicted on 27 February of forming a criminal gang, conspiracy against the established government or president, complicity in a terrorist act and conspiracy to murder. He pleaded not guilty on all charges when the trial began last November. His lawyer said he will appeal.

"We are outraged by the Kigali court's decision to sentence the journalist Cassien Ntamuhanga to 25 years in prison," Reporters Without Borders deputy programme director Virginie Dangles said.

"This harsh and disproportionate sentence reflect the authoritarian nature of President Kagame's government and its growing desire to gag all dissent in the run-up to the 2017 presidential elections, when Kagame could be tempted to run for another term although the constitution currently forbids this. We call for this verdict to be overturned on appeal."

The prosecution requested a life sentence for Ntamuhanga and his three co-defendants. One of them, the very popular singer Kizito Mihigo, got a ten-year jail term after pleading guilty. Demobilized soldier Jean-Paul Dukuzumuremyi got 30 years. The third co-defendant, Agnès Niyibizi, was acquitted on a charge of acting as treasurer of the Rwanda National Congress (RNC), an opposition party in exile that the government regards as a "terrorist" organization.

All four were arrested in April 2014, at a time when Rwanda was commemorating the 20th anniversary of the 1994 genocide and many people were criticizing a growing government crackdown.

Colleagues say Ntamuhanga never had any problems until he was [reported missing](#) on 7 April 2014. The police finally confirmed a week later that he was in their custody without saying where he was arrested, leading the Rwanda Media Commission to suggest that he was held illegally from 7 to 14 April.

During his trial, Ntamuhanga accused the police of detaining him illegally and extracting a confession under duress.

Rwanda is ranked 161st out of 180 countries in the [2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).
