

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALISTS AT RISK FROM RESTRICTIVE LAW

A draft press law which would severely limit the activities of journalists has been adopted by the Burundian Senate and is expected to be promulgated by the President of Burundi shortly. Freedom of expression is under threat in Burundi.

If the draft law is passed, it could make journalists criminally liable for carrying out their work, introduce new press-related crimes and exorbitant fines for those who violate its provisions. Journalists in Burundi have been subjected to harassment, intimidation and arbitrary arrest over recent years. Yet despite this, Burundi still has a vibrant media which serves as an important source of information on a range of issues important to Burundians, including allegations of human rights abuses and corruption. Journalists operate throughout the country and carry out sensitive investigations, sometimes putting themselves in danger.

The draft law on the press, in its latest form, would place undue restrictions on the work of journalists, limiting Burundians' freedom to seek and impart information and ideas.

The draft law was passed by the National Assembly on 3 April 2013. It then went to the Burundian Senate where certain small changes were made to the text. A number of problematic provisions remain however, yet the Burundian Senate adopted the law on 19 April 2013. President Nkurunziza is scheduled to sign the law shortly upon which it will be promulgated.

Certain provisions in the draft law are especially restrictive and the law would violate the right to freedom of expression, preventing Burundian journalists from conducting their legitimate work. Certain articles create numerous new requirements for journalists to follow in the course of their work. Failure to do so can result in steep fines. Many of these requirements are overly broad and may therefore be used to prevent the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. According to the latest version of the law, article 20 restricts the right to report on anything that relates to state and public security, information that threatens the national economy, or insulting the President (*outrages et injures à l'endroit du Chef de l'Etat*).

Please write immediately in French, English or your own language:

- √ Urging the President to reject the draft press law in its current form.
- √ Calling on him to guarantee freedom of expression to all journalists in Burundi and allow them to carry out their legitimate work freely and independently.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 05 JUNE 2013 TO:

President of Burundi
Pierre Nkurunziza
Office of the President
Boulevard de l'Uprona
BP 1870
Bujumbura, Burundi
Fax: +257 2224 8908
Email: president@burundi.bi
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 100/13. Further information:

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Despite amendments by the Burundian Senate, the draft press law still includes new provisions introducing circumstances in which journalists must disclose sources.

The Burundian Senate did reduce possible fines. However, these remain as high as 6,000,000 Burundian francs (approximately US \$3,760), which media outlets would be unable to afford.

In Burundi, the ruling party, the National Council for Defence of Democracy-Forces for Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), governs without any effective opposition engagement, following the withdrawal of opposition parties from the 2010 elections. Burundian journalists report harassment and intimidation by the authorities because of their work.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Burundian Constitution all set out recognized standards of freedom of expression.

Name: Journalists in Burundi

Gender m/f: Both