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<http://www.rsf.org/rwanda-bbc-local-broadcasting-in-rwanda-04-03-2015,47645.html>

Africa - Rwanda

Censoring history

BBC broadcasting in Rwanda under threat

4 March 2015

Reporters Without Borders is shocked by the findings of a Rwandan commission of enquiry into a BBC television documentary and, in particular, by its recommendations that the Rwandan authorities should end local broadcasting by the BBC and bring legal proceedings against it.

The commission was appointed to investigate alleged genocide denial in "Rwanda: The Untold Story," a documentary that Britain's state-owned radio and TV corporation broadcast last October.

After deliberating for three months, the commission said in a report released on 28 February: "*The BBC, in general, abused press freedom and free speech, violated its own editorial guidelines, transgressed journalistic standards, and violated Rwandan law, with particular reference to genocide denial and revisionism, inciting hatred, and divisionism among Rwandans.*"

The commission advised the government to terminate its broadcasting agreement with BBC, without saying whether it meant just radio broadcasting or TV and Internet as well, and recommended that the "*respective organs of the Rwandan government initiate criminal and civil processes.*" It added that the agreement could be renewed under certain conditions, which should include acknowledgement by the BBC that it was in the wrong.

"*We are appalled by the commission of enquiry's disproportionate recommendations,*" said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

"*By trying to censor the BBC and impose a one-sided version of history that allows no debate, the commission is violating free speech and media freedom. It should amend its findings, in order not to censor what is Rwanda's main independent news outlet, and the government should allow the BBC to reopen its local branch or else it will expose itself to further accusations of authoritarianism*" she added.

The final decision on the BBC's fate will be taken by the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA) after studying the commission's report. The government's decision to give the RURA the final say in this matter violated its own regulations.

The BBC, which declined to appear before the commission, told Reporters Without Borders that it had no option but to await the RURA's decision and that no recourse would be available if the RURA decided to implement the commission's recommendations.

[After the authorities already suspended the BBC's Kinyarwanda broadcasts on 25 October](#), the BBC fears that its Swahili and English-language broadcasts in Rwanda will also be terminated.

"*We are extremely disappointed by the findings of this commission,*" the BBC said in a statement on 1 March. "*We stand by our right to produce the independent journalism which has made us the world's most trusted news source.*"

The statement added that, according to the provisional findings of the BBC's own internal investigation, the documentary did not breach its editorial standards and constituted "*a valuable contribution to the understanding of the tragic history of the country and the region.*"

President Paul Kagame, who refused to be interviewed for the documentary, accused the BBC of trying to deny the facts of the 1994 genocide and smear Rwanda's image – accusations he often uses when he wants to silence criticism.

Any formal reference to ethnicity is punishable by imprisonment on a charge of promoting "divisions." Over the years, the term "Rwandan genocide" has gradually been replaced by "genocide of the Tutsis," thereby pre-empting any challenges to the official history.

Any questioning of the "Rwandan spirit" has been effectively banned since October 2013 by a government campaign called "Ndi Umunyarwanda" ("I am Rwandan"), the doctrinal basis of which includes acceptance of collective Hutu guilt for the genocide's victims.

In 2009, the Rwandan government temporarily suspended the BBC's radio broadcasts in Kinyarwanda because of a programme about the genocide that was also described at the time as revisionist.

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

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