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Africa - Rwanda

Censorship

Rwandan parliament calls for BBC to be banned

24 October 2014

The parliamentary motion was prompted by a controversial documentary about the 1994 genocide

The Rwandan parliament passed a resolution on 22 October calling on the government to ban the *BBC* and bring "genocide denial" charges against the presenter and producer of a controversial TV documentary about the 1994 Rwandan genocide that the *BBC* broadcast in early October.

The vote came a few days after President Paul Kagame himself accused the *BBC* of "denying the genocide" of Rwanda's Tutsi minority by members of the Hutu majority.

"This parliamentary resolution is not surprising inasmuch as the Kagame government allows the political opposition no room to exist in Rwanda," said Cl ea Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

"It is extremely worrying that the *BBC*, one of the few independent media that manages to be seen or heard within Rwanda, is in the process of being banned. We call on the government to implement the democratic principles it so readily professes in international forums and to let the media express themselves freely."

Members of student organizations consisting mainly of genocide survivors staged demonstrations outside the *BBC*'s Kigali bureau and parliament a few hours before the resolution's adoption and handed in a memorandum calling on the government to rescind the *BBC*'s licence to broadcast in Rwanda. They also demanded a formal *BBC* apology to the Rwandan people and the entire world.

Entitled "Rwanda, The Untold Story," the documentary caused a storm by interviewing US-based researchers who, with the help of maps, argued that the number of Hutus killed in the genocide was much higher than generally recognized. The Rwandan government declined the *BBC*'s requests to be interviewed for the documentary.

According to the United Nations, an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered from April to July 1994.

The Kagame government has a history of refusing to comment on the human rights situation and imposing extreme censorship on freedom of information.

At least five journalists have fled the country this year because of persecution, and several were arrested and threatened by the police before and after ceremonies in April marking the 20th anniversary of the genocide. Good Morning Rwanda, *Flash FM*'s popular phone-in programme, was banned in June. The [US State Department](#) condemned all of these developments.

An official denial of the claims made in the documentary was posted on the Rwandan government website but is no longer available online.

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

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 questioning of the official history.

Rwanda is ranked 162nd out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

[More information about freedom of information in Rwanda](#)
