

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/rwanda-unhcr-urged-to-review-decision-to-11-10-2011,41158.html>

Africa - Rwanda

End to refugee status?

UNHCR urged to review decision to withdraw refugee status from Rwandan refugees

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Reporters Without Borders fails to understand a decision by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to urge countries that have given asylum to Rwandan refugees to withdraw their refugee status by the middle of next year on the grounds that political life in Rwanda is back to normal.

"What normalization is UNCHR talking about?" Reporters Without Borders asked. "President Paul Kagame was reelected with 93 per cent of the vote in 2010 in an election in which his main opponents could not take part. One is in prison and another is in exile and escaped an assassination attempt. The Rwandan authorities do not tolerate criticism. The independent press is harassed.

"Even in exile, some refugees are in danger. Three Rwandan refugee journalists were the victims of a mysterious attack in the Ugandan capital of Kampala at the end of August. Another Rwandan journalist had a similar experience in Kampala a year ago. The assailants in both cases spoke Kinyarwanda. Dozens of people, including many journalists, will be endangered if governments and UNHCR withdraw the refugee status of Rwandan refugees and make them go back to Rwanda."

A meeting of the governments of asylum countries and other relevant actors is to be held in December to organize what is to be done with Rwandan refugees. UNHCR spokesperson Fatoumata Lejeune-Kaba said the refugee agency intends to recommend cessation of refugee status for Rwandans by 30 June 2012.

A Rwandan journalist who is a refugee in Europe told Reporters Without Borders: "The refugee camps continue to be the main recruiting centres of children and youths by armed groups so dismantling them is the best way to combat the reorganization of these dangerous armed groups in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. But it would be a big mistake, a grave human rights violation, to turn a blind eye to the suppression of free expression in Rwanda and to withdraw the refugee status of government opponents, journalists and human rights activists, who would risk imprisonment or murder."

Another Rwandan journalist, one who is refugee in southern Africa, said: "Lots of Rwandan refugees live in appalling conditions outside of Rwanda, above all in nearby African countries. If they don't go back, they must have a reason. We want to return to a country where our rights and freedoms are guaranteed. But in Rwanda, you just have to be unfairly accused of 'genocide denial' or 'revisionism' and you go to jail. We cannot return to a country where arbitrary justice reigns."

Reporters Without Borders points out that two women journalists, **Agnes Uwimana Nkusi** and **Saidath Mukakibibi**, are serving sentences of 17 and seven years in jail respectively on charges of inciting civil disobedience, causing divisions and denying the 1994 genocide of the Tutsis.

Every year, Reporters Without Borders registers several cases of Rwandan journalists being threatened, harassed and forced to flee the country. Around 10 have fled abroad since the start of 2010. Reporters Without Borders has approved 10 assistance grants for Rwandan journalists or their families during the same period.

Cessation of refugee status would jeopardize the safety of many Rwandan journalists who have been helped by Reporters Without Borders.

In a report released to mark World Refugee Day on 20 June, entitled "Forced to flee but not silenced – exile media fight on," Reporters Without Borders included a profile of **Jean-Bosco Gasasira**, the Rwandan editor of the Umuvugizi.com news website, who is a refugee in Sweden. [Read the report.](#)

Rwanda is ranked 169th out of 178 countries in the 2010 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. This is Africa's third worst ranking. Only Eritrea and Sudan are below it in the index.

[More information on media freedom in Rwanda.](#)
