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Africa - Tanzania

Unacceptable intimidation

Letter to home minister about harassment of leading journalist

26 February 2013

Reporters Without Borders wrote to Tanzanian minister of home affairs Emmanuel Nchimbi last week to call for an end to the harassment of the journalist **Erick Kabendera** and his family by representatives of the state.

"Tanzania's ranking in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index is 36 places lower than last year," the 18 February letter said. "No journalists had been killed until September 2012, but thereafter two were killed in the space of four months and this has had a big impact on the Tanzanian news environment.

"Harassment by officials of such a respected journalist as Mr. Kabendera can only exacerbate the current sense of helplessness among Tanzanian journalists, especially when everything indicates that it is not random. These intimidation attempts are targeting a talented journalist and seem designed to protect a senior official who was affected by his testimony."

Signed by secretary-general Christophe Deloire, the letter added: "Reporters Without Borders urges you to call the Immigration Department to order so that this disgraceful harassment stops. We also urge you to tell the police that they must do whatever is necessary to guarantee the safety of Mr. Kabendera and his family."

A former employee of the Dar es Salaam-based *Guardian* newspaper, Kabendera was a 2009 winner of the David Astor Journalism Award for journalists who are "exceptionally promising and with a great potential for excellence in the future."

In December 2012 in London, he testified for the defence in a libel suit that Tanzanian businessman and *Guardian* owner Reginald Mengi brought against British blogger Sarah Hermitage.

Ever since his return to Tanzania, he has been the target of intimidation attempts. His home has been ransacked three times and Immigration officials have been casting doubt on his nationality without any legal grounds.

His elderly and ailing parents were escorted in an appalling manner to a regional immigration office where they were subjected to an eight-hour interrogation and were asked to sign documents without being allowed to read them.

Although life-long employees of the Tanzanian state, Kabendera's parents obtained limited and unsatisfactory explanations from the officials who interrogated them. The officials said that the investigation was ordered by Immigration Department Commissioner Magnus Paul Ulungi, and that it was a "sensitive" matter that had to be followed "closely." One official added that Kabendera was suspected of selling state secrets to "European powers" but "everything will be all right" if he remains "humble."

[After falling 36 places, Tanzania is now ranked 70th out of 179 countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.](#)

Photo : Erick Kabendera

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