

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/burundi-authorities-target-independent-24-04-2015,47809.html>

Africa - Burundi

Burundian powder keg

Authorities target independent journalists in run-up to elections

24 April 2015

As Burundi's ruling party prepares to hold a congress tomorrow to choose its presidential candidate, Reporters Without Borders is worried about an increase in harassment of the country's privately-owned media.

Harassment of journalists and news media is not new in Burundi, but there has been an increase in recent months. Covering politics has become a minefield for reporters due not only to the presidential election scheduled for 26 June, currently the main focus of attention, but also the legislative and municipal elections scheduled for 26 May.

The judicial system is letting itself be used to prosecute journalists on trumped-up charges. The leading target is *Radio Publique Africaine (RPA)*, Burundi's most popular radio station, which is well known for being critical of the government. Its journalists are often the victims of abusive proceedings.

Yvette Murekasabe, the head of the *RPA* branch in the northern city of Ngozi, was charged in early April with defaming Jules Ndatimana, the provincial head of the ruling CNDD-FDD's youth wing, known as the Imbonerakure (Lookouts), after she reported that, at an Imbonerakure meeting, he had called for violence against those opposing a third term for President Pierre Nkurunziza.

At a hearing on 10 April, she refused to comply when told to identify her sources. On the morning of 21 April, she received another summons to appear before judicial officials later the same day but was unable to go because she was not in the city at the time.

Alexis Nimubona, an *RPA* reporter in the northeastern city of Muyinga, is being prosecuted on a charge of insulting the city administrator for reporting that municipal market traders were unhappy with his management of the market. He was threatened by Muyinga's police chief in February after a report about bodies being found in the River Rweru, on the border with Rwanda.

RPA director **Bob Rugurika**, [who was held for four weeks in January and February in connection with his coverage of the murder of three Italian nuns](#), is meanwhile still charged with complicity in their murder.

He was previously targeted by the authorities for reporting that young Burundians were training in Sud-Kivu, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. He says he has been getting death threats ever since.

Serge Sindayigaya, privately-owned *Radio Bonasha FM's* correspondent in the southern city of Makamba, was questioned by a prosecutor all day on 9 April after reporting that weapons were being distributed to the Imbonerakure – a sensitive subject in the run-up to the elections, especially as senior police officers were said to be responsible for the distribution.

In the past year, no fewer than four journalists have been prosecuted or questioned by judicial officials in connection with reports about the distribution of arms to the Imbonerakure, which the authorities clearly regard as a sensitive issue. The four journalists were *RPA's* **Eloge Nionzima** and *Bonasha FM's* **Alexis Nshekimana** (in the northwestern city of Bubanza in April 2014), Alexis Nimubona in May 2014 and *Bonasha FM's* **Hamissi Karihungu** in the central city of Gitega in October 2014.

"Burundi is facing a decisive moment in its democratic history and we are worried by these judicial summonses, which have all the hallmarks of attempts to intimidate journalists who provide critical reporting on the authorities," said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

Radio Rehma, a pro-government radio station, has meanwhile been taking a tougher line since last month, often interviewing people whose comments verge on constituting incitement to violence. A guest on a programme on 6 April said: "I would like to warn these civil society people that we no longer need to build cemeteries and monuments on their land."

The station has not however been penalized or told to moderate its tone.

Kahn-Sriber added: "*It is obviously important in the run-up to the elections for journalists to act responsibly and not broadcast inflammatory statements, but this rule must apply to all the media regardless of their editorial line.*"

Reporters Without Borders has also noted several recent attempts to intimidate journalists in a violent manner.

The home of *Radio Isanganiro's* correspondent in Bubanza, **Spès-Caritas Kabanyana**, was attacked twice on the nights of 15 and 16 April by unidentified persons, who threw stones and banged the roof with clubs.

Her coverage of illegal activity by the Imbonerakure (including possession of weapons and voter enrolment fraud) may have been the reason. Imbonerakure members had already tried to intimidate her in the past. The police are reportedly looking for those responsible for the attacks on her home.

Bonesha FM journalist **Egide Ndayisenga** was the target of a grenade attack as he arrived at his home in Musaga (in Bujumbura province) on the evening of 11 April. The grenade caused damage to the house but did not injure Ndayisenga, who thinks the attack was linked to coverage of the discovery of an arms cache in Kabezi. The head of the intelligence service and the local police chief were seen near his home on the night of the attack.

The next days and weeks will be decisive for Burundi, which is ranked 145th out of 180 countries in the [2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

(Photo: AFP)

You can download those documents on our website :

- , (JPEG - 61.2 kb)
-