

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/burundi-journalist-finally-allowed-to-09-11-2012,43665.html>

Africa - Burundi

"I am not a terrorist"

Journalist finally allowed to testify, court urged to quash conviction

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Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn that radio reporter **Hassan Ruvakuki** was finally allowed to testify yesterday to the court in the central city of Gitega that is hearing his appeal against his terrorism conviction, for which he was given a life sentence last June.

The court began examining his appeal a month ago but Ruvakuki, who works for *Bonesha FM* and *Radio France Internationale's* Swahili service, had to sit through four previous hearings before finally being able to protest his innocence and defend his actions.

According to *Agence France-Presse*, he told the court: "I am not a terrorist. I never was and I never will be. I am a journalist."

"Allowing Ruvakuki and his lawyers to speak in court was an important step and it is good to know it finally happened," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said. "But this legal saga will not be over until his conviction is overturned and he is released.

"The prosecutor-general's claims are baseless and, now that the defence has presented its arguments clearly, the appeal court's president must come to the logical conclusion and release this journalist. In view of the fact that he has already spent nearly a year in prison for no reason, any other outcome would be incomprehensible."

In the course of two hours of testimony, Ruvakuki repeated what [he had already recounted in a letter written from Muramvya prison](#), namely that he does not deny going to Tanzania to find out about a new Burundian rebel group based there, but he did this solely for journalistic reasons.

Prosecutor-general Emmanuel Nyandwi thinks that the mere fact the Ruvakuki entered Tanzania clandestinely, and without getting permission from his employer, shows that he was linked to the "terrorist" group. Nyandwi acknowledges that he has no other evidence against him. The defence explained that investigative reporters often have to behave in such a manner.

Another hearing is due to be held today. The court is expected to issue its ruling within two months.

[More information about the Ruvakuki case.](#)

A four-day SEFOR seminar for public service broadcasters from French-speaking countries is meanwhile due to conclude today in the Burundian capital of Bujumbura.

Funded by international government aid and organized by the International Council for Radio and TV Broadcasting Expression (CIRTEF), it drew a large number of participants from France, Belgium, Canada, Switzerland and around 20 African countries.

Photo : Hassan Ruvakuki (RM)

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