

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/burundi-anger-and-puzzlement-over-life-21-06-2012,42845.html>

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Africa - Burundi

Jailed for life

## Anger and puzzlement over life sentence passed on French radio's reporter

21 June 2012

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*Radio France Internationale (RFI)* and Reporters Without Borders are very angry about the sentence of life imprisonment that a court in the eastern city of Cankuzo passed yesterday on **Hassan Ruvakuki**, a reporter for *Bonesha FM* and *RFI's* Swahili service, on a charge of "participating in acts of terrorism." His lawyer plans to appeal.

Representatives of *RFI*, France's international public radio broadcaster, and Reporters Without Borders learned of the sentence yesterday in the capital, Bujumbura, as they were winding up a four-day visit dedicated to the case.

"Hassan Ruvakuki's right to fair trial was not respected," *RFI* and Reporters Without Borders said. "The judges were biased and incompetent, defence rights were violated and the sentence was decided in advance on the basis of spurious arguments. Everything suggests that it was a politically-motivated reprisal.

"The fact that a bill decriminalizing media offences is currently being discussed in Burundi makes it all the more incomprehensible. The authorities have sent a journalist to prison – for no less a period than life – at the very moment that a law designed to protect journalists from imprisonment is on the point of being adopted."

*RFI* and Reporters Without Borders added: "Burundi is preparing to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its independence on 1 July but the party announced by the authorities has already been spoiled. The fight to defend Ruvakuki is just beginning. His lawyer and the Burundian media, whose protests we salute, can count on our renewed support. We stand alongside them."

*RFI* and Reporters Without Borders already issued a joint statement yesterday in Bujumbura, immediately after the verdict was announced.

"We are extremely shocked by the sentence passed on our colleague," yesterday's statement said. "The verdict and sentence are immoral and shameful. They are a disgrace not only for Burundi's justice system but also for the country as a whole. The prosecution case against Ruvakuki was empty. He was just doing his job. This is a black day for media freedom and justice in Burundi."

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

During their four-day visit to Bujumbura, Jean-Karim Fall, the deputy director of the Africa section of *RFI's* French-language service, and Ambroise Pierre, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa Desk, met with the interior minister, foreign minister and communication minister, the permanent secretary of the justice ministry, the attorney general and the chief of staff of the National Intelligence Service (SNR).

They also visited the National Communication Council (CNC) and several Bujumbura-based media including *Bonesha FM*, the Burundian radio station that employs Ruvakuki; they were received by the ambassadors of France and Belgium; and they had two meetings with Ruvakuki's lawyer, Onésime Kababayaya.

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## 20.06.2012 – Hassan Ruvakuki’s life sentence – “immoral and shameful” for Burundi

The journalist **Hassan Ruvakuki** was sentenced to life imprisonment at around 5:45 p.m. today. *Radio France Internationale* and Reporters Without Borders received the news during a visit to the Burundian capital, Bujumbura. A reporter for *Bonesha FM* and *RFI*’s Swahili service, Ruvakuki was convicted of “participating in acts of terrorism.”

“We are extremely shocked by the sentence passed on our colleague,” the French public broadcaster and media freedom organization said. “The verdict and sentence are immoral and shameful. They are a disgrace not only for Burundi’s justice system but also for the country as a whole. The prosecution case against Ruvakuki was empty. He was just doing his job. This is a black day for media freedom and justice in Burundi.”

*RFI* and Reporters Without Borders added: “His lawyer will obviously appeal and we are confident that he will succeed in demonstrating Hassan’s innocence.”

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

A full report on the *RFI* and Reporters Without Borders visit to Burundi is to be released on 21 June.

Photos : Photo : Hassan Ruvakuki (Iwacu - Les Voix du Burundi) (Esdras Ndikumana/AFP)

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