

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/burundi-authorities-urged-to-lift-news-23-09-2011,41045.html>

Africa - Burundi

Drastic curbs

Authorities urged to lift news blackout imposed after Gatumba massacre

23 September 2011

Reporters Without Borders wrote yesterday to President Pierre Nkurunziza and information minister Concilie Nibigira urging them to immediately lift the news blackout that has been imposed on the media following last weekend's [massacre in Gatumba](#). In an alarming move, the authorities have banned all live broadcasts of a political nature for a month and have forbidden the media to cover the official enquiry that has been launched into the massacre.

Here is the text of the letter:

Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza President of the Republic

Ms. Concilie Nibigira, Minister of Telecommunications, Information, Communication and Relations with Parliament Bujumbura, Burundi

Paris, 22 September 2011

Dear President Nkurunziza, Dear Minister Nibigira,

Reporters Without Borders, an international organization that defends media freedom, is shocked by the ban you imposed yesterday on the Burundian media from "publishing, commenting or doing analyses in connection with the ongoing investigations into the carnage in Gatumba."

On the grounds of "guaranteeing peace and security" and ensuring "the successful conclusion of the investigations," you have extended this ban to all ongoing judicial investigations and you have, furthermore, suspended all broadcasts of a political nature "during the month that the enquiry into the Gatumba massacre will take."

These measures were taken on the recommendation of the National Security Council, which accused the media of wanting to "take advantage of this situation to spread confusion, divide the population and incite confrontation."

While we understand that the authorities are concerned about the media's coverage of certain sensitive subjects, a complete blackout on the main news story of current interest to the country is always excessive.

Last July in Guinea, the National Communication Council [banned the media](#) from covering an attack on President Alpha Condé's residence. The ban caused an outcry in Guinea and abroad. The media refused to comply with the order, which was quickly lifted.

You are now taking a course similar to the one taken by the Guinean media regulatory body, issuing an order that is tantamount to imposing a form of prior censorship on the media. If you maintain this order, the media will be prevented from covering all investigations currently being conducted by the police and prosecutors, including cases of corruption and extrajudicial execution in which individuals close to the ruling party may be responsible.

Several radio stations have just decided to work together in order to continue to cover security issues in Burundi. We are giving them our support.

We are aware that the tragedy that has just taken place in Gatumba has shocked the Burundian people and is causing tension, but gagging freedom of expression is never the way to safeguard peace. On the contrary, you should promote social dialogue and guarantee Burundian society's right to information. We therefore urge you to rescind this order without delay.

We thank you in advance for the attention you give to our request.

Sincerely,

Jean-François Julliard Secretary-General

Photo : Président Pierre Nkurunziza (EANA / The Citizen)
