

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/burundi-media-regulator-suspends-comments-31-05-2013,44695.html>

Africa - Burundi

“Instructive signal”

## Media regulator suspends comments on press group’s website

31 May 2013

Reporters Without Borders is disturbed to learn that the National Communication Council (CNC), Burundi’s media regulator, has ordered the Iwacu press group to prevent visitors to its website ([www.iwacu-burundi.org](http://www.iwacu-burundi.org)) from posting comments for the next 30 days.

“This is unprecedented,” Reporters Without Borders said. “Until now, the CNC had never taken a disciplinary measure against a website, still less an online forum. Would it not be more appropriate to take issue with the comments regarded as problematic, rather than suspend the entire forum?”

“We do not dispute the need to moderate certain kinds of comments posted by Internet users, but we fear that this decision could lead to a new form of control over the media and free speech.”

CNC chair Pierre Bambasi told Reporters Without Borders: “We are not censoring the website, which is good, just the comments. The measure we have adopted is more of an instructive signal than anything else. Internet users need to know that we are reading what they write.”

Bambasi added: “However, we know that a moderator’s work is not easy. Iwacu has told us they get about 4,000 messages [a week] and only post 1,500 of them. But this is not enough. We cannot have individuals or groups screaming abuse on the Internet, stirring up ethnic hatred, talking of taking up arms and urging the people to rise up.”

In Decision No. 100/CNC/004/2013 of 30 May, of which Reporters Without Borders has a copy, the CNC said that comments posted during the previous two days “violated the terms of articles 10 and 50 of the Media Law regarding attacks on national unity, public order and security, inciting ethnic hatred, defending criminal activity and insulting the head of state.”

Both Iwacu’s publisher, Antoine Kaburahe, and the website’s administrator, Roland Rugero, took issue with the CNC’s criticism of their forum moderation.

“We went to the CNC this week to explain how we handle the comments posted on our forum” Rugero told RWB. “There may obviously be some comments that initially escape our vigilance, but we delete them as soon as our attention is drawn to them.

“In the past few days, what with the news of a family’s eviction, the restitution of property lost in 1972 and the events in Gatumba, it is inevitable that there were comments referring to ethnic questions. But we pay close attention and remove everything that is unacceptable.”

Kaburahe added: “Our site has been operating for the past five years and the comments are handled professionally. We have never had any problem. Given the volume of comments that are deleted, it would be hard for the CNC to demonstrate our alleged bad faith or capacity to cause harm. We regret its decision but we are going to comply. As we regard the website and forum as one and the same, we have decided to suspend the entire site.”

Read [Iwacu’s press release](#) on the website’s suspension. Iwacu was due to hold a news conference at the Bujumbura press club at 4 p.m. today.

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