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Africa - Burundi

Judicial persecution

Court refuses to free radio journalist, upholds charges

4 February 2015

A Bujumbura court today confirmed criminal charges against *Radio Publique Africaine* director **Bob Rugurika** in connection with his coverage of the murder of three Italian nuns, and refused to hear a request by his lawyers for his provisional release.

Detained since 22 January, Rugurika is facing a possible 20-year jail sentence on charges of complicity in the triple murder, harbouring criminals, violating the confidentiality of a judicial investigation and "failing to show solidarity."

"*These charges have been maintained with the aim of gagging Burundi's most popular news outlet,*" said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

"*The decision sends a threatening message to all of Burundi's journalists and constitutes a grave attack on freedom of information. We reiterate our call for Rugurika's immediate release.*"

Journalists and civil society representatives staged a second demonstration yesterday in Bujumbura to show support for Rugurika and demand his release.

At today's hearing, the deputy prosecutor said Rugurika could not be granted a provisional release because he might contact people linked to the triple murder.

Reporters Without Borders condemns leading radio journalist **Bob Rugurika's** arbitrary detention for the past week and the charges brought against him, which include complicity in the murder of three Italian nuns last September.

Rugurika is the director of Bujumbura-based *Radio Publique Africaine (RPA)*, which is renowned for its investigative reporting and is Burundi's most popular privately-owned radio station.

He was arrested on the orders of a prosecutor and taken to Bujumbura's main prison, Mpimba, on 20 January after initially receiving a summons to present himself to judicial officials for the stated purpose of providing "clarification" on his reporting.

Rugurika is accused of complicity in the murder of the nuns, violating the confidentiality of a judicial investigation and "failing to show solidarity" – all in connection with *RPA's* coverage of the triple murder. The charges carry a possible 20-year jail sentence.

The station's reporting implicated intelligence officials and included an interview with a person who confessed to being one of the perpetrators and who is still on the run. The confession embarrassed the police because they had claimed to have already arrested the perpetrators.

"*We strongly condemn Rugurika's unjustified detention, which has the sole aim of pressuring him into revealing the identity of his contacts,*" said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

"*These actions clearly reveal the Burundian justice system's lack of independence from the government. Instead of actively investigating the triple murder, it has preferred to target a journalist who was just doing his job. Such behaviour is worrying for freedom of expression and information. This type of intimidation is likely to worsen in the electoral run-up. We call for Rugurika's immediate release.*"

Two days after his arrest, Rugurika was transferred to Muramvya prison, 30 km outside the capital, where he spent the first day in solitary confinement. Since then, he has been allowed to receive visits from his lawyer and his family.

His lawyer, Jean Bosco Ngendakuvwayo, told Reporters Without Borders: " If he was summoned as a journalist for questioning about his news coverage, he should be charged as a journalist under the press law, not under the criminal code as is the case at the moment."

Ngendakuvwayo added that he is calling for his client's "immediate and unconditional release" on the grounds that he is being held arbitrarily.

Under Burundian law, Rugurika must be brought before a judge by 4 February to determine whether he will remain in detention.

[Burundi adopted a media law in 2013](#) that criminalizes certain kinds of reporting, including reporting involving national security, and makes it possible to force journalists to name their sources.

Burundi is ranked 142nd out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

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