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<http://www.rsf.org/burundi-another-nail-in-the-coffin-of-10-06-2015,47993.html>

Africa - Burundi

Persecution

Another nail in the coffin of independent information in Burundi

10 June 2015

Burundi's leading privately-owned radio and TV stations are not only still forcibly closed but now they are also being banned from using the collective radio studio located in Bujumbura's "House of the Press," which is being allowed to resume operating.

The main privately-owned broadcasters continue to be the subject of a judicial investigation with the result that their journalists cannot return to work because police are still stationed outside.

In [a letter to the head of the House of the Press](#), state prosecutor Valentin Bagorikunda has given permission for the reopening of its radio studio, which the "media synergy" coalition of broadcasters had been using until [its closure on 27 April](#).

But there is one big snag. Bagorikunda's letter said that "*because of a judicial investigation (...) any employee of Radio Bonasha FM, Radio Télévision Renaissance, Radio RPA (Bujumbura and Ngozi), Radio Isanganiro and Radio Humuriza FM*" is forbidden to use the studio.

In practice, this excludes any journalist working for a privately-owned radio or TV station except *Radio Rema*, which is also under judicial investigation but supports the government.

"*This decision is discriminatory and unacceptable*," said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk. "*It not only violates freedom of information but also insults the intelligence of the Burundian public and international community.*"

"*While pretending to ease restrictions, this measure is designed to maintain the ban on pluralistic media coverage in Burundi. Human right groups have reported the abuses committed by the security forces and government militias, the arbitrary arrests and violence against civilians. But these abuses are not getting any media coverage. No media are able to cover them for the local and international public.*"

Kahn-Sriber added: "*Under these circumstances, what can be the legitimacy of the elections scheduled for late June and mid-July under the new electoral calendar? The international community must insist on the reopening of privately-owned media as a condition for supporting the electoral process.*"

The state prosecutor's letter is all the more shocking because the [privately-owned media](#) wrote to him two weeks ago requesting permission to recover access to their premises in order to resume operating.

Extending the battle ground In addition to shutting down the privately-owned media, the government is tightening its grip on *Radio Nationale*, the state-owned national radio station, which until recently had maintained a degree of objectivity, sometimes interviewing government opponents and acknowledging demonstrations were taking place.

Radio Nationale chief **Freddy Nzeyimana** was fired on 4 June and replaced by Jouma Leonard Dwayio, a primary school teacher.

A purge is also being carried out throughout the *Radio Nationale* services. Several journalists have been transferred from news reporting to the internal control or training departments while pressure has been put on news editor **Jacques Bukuru**, who has a reputation for being respectful of

professional journalistic ethics.

Télévision Nationale, the state-owned TV broadcaster, has so far been spared because it continues to tamely echo "its master's voice," as one Bujumbura-based foreign diplomat put it.

Some journalists working for international news media have told Reporters Without Borders that they have been harassed or physically threatened by the security forces, which is making hard for them to work. Most of them are not reporting outside of Bujumbura.

On 4 June, the National Council for Communication (CNC), which regulates the media, [withdrew accreditation from a France 24 reporter](#), who left the country the same day. The CNC accused him of violating the conditions of his accreditation, which was to cover the elections. A properly accredited *BBC* reporter was reportedly turned backed on arrival at Bujumbura airport ten days before that.

Around 50 Burundian journalists have fled the country for security reasons and say it is still too dangerous to go back. The state prosecutor's decisions would seem to support their fears.

Burundi is ranked 145th out of 180 countries in the [2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

Crédit Photo:Valentin Bagorikunda, Agence Bujumbura News Façade de la RPA, Jennifer Huxta / AFP

You can download those documents on our website :

- , (JPEG - 92.7 kb)
 - Lettre du procureur de la République du Burundi 10 juin 2015, (Word - 278.8 kb)
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