

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/rwanda-bimonthly-decides-to-suspend-31-08-2011,40877.html>

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Africa - Rwanda

Newspaper hounded

## Bimonthly decides to suspend publication after receiving threats

31 August 2011

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The publisher of the bimonthly *Ishema*, **Fidèle Gakire**, decided jointly with the newspaper's board to suspend publication for a month on 28 August as a result of the serious threats he has reportedly been receiving. The newspaper has had problems ever since it ran an opinion piece in mid-July that called President Paul Kagame a "sociopath."

"*Ishema's* decision reflects the unease that independent publications often feel in Rwanda," Reporters Without Borders said. "After being taken to task by the pro-government High Media Council, the newspaper apologized and its publisher was sanctioned. He has nonetheless continued to be the target of threats and a smear campaign and this has prompted him to temporarily suspend operations."

Gakire quickly apologized after the High Media Council, the state-run media regulatory body, ruled that the reference to the president as a "sociopath" was libellous. The newspaper's editor, **Didas Niyifasha**, resigned claiming the article was published without his knowledge. At the same time, the Forum of Private Newspapers suspended Gakire for six months as a member.

Gakire then lost no time in bringing out a special issue of *Ishema* with the word *Imbabazi* (Sorry) on the cover and virtually nothing inside but old articles praising the president which the newspaper had published in the past.

The authorities and pro-government journalists hailed *Ishema's* reaction and praised media self-regulation.

But a member of the public complained to the High Media Council a few days later claiming he had been wronged by the newspaper. Then Ancilla Mukarubuga, a woman living in the Kigali district of Gasabo, said she had been shocked by articles published in *Ishema* and, in her neighbourhood, collected 1,500 signatures to a petition for sanctions against the newspaper. Finally, Gakire reported receiving serious threats in recent days.

A debate about media self-regulation is meanwhile under way in Rwanda and a new media law is being discussed in parliament. It would transfer responsibility for media regulation from the High Media Council to a panel of journalists. As first step to creating this self-regulatory body, Rwanda's journalists have just adopted a new code of professional conduct.

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