

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/burundi-authorities-poised-to-move-against-21-03-2014,46032.html>

---

Africa - Burundi

Threatened with closure

## Authorities poised to move against popular radio station

21 March 2014

---

Reporters Without Borders is concerned about the threat of closure hanging over Burundi's most popular radio station, privately-owned *Radio Publique Africaine (RPA)*, because of its coverage of the current political unrest.

Burundi's Security Council, a body headed by the president, issued a statement on 16 March accusing *RPA* and other media of "sowing fear in the population" and calling on the National Communication Council (CNC), of which new bureau members were appointed last week, to take appropriate measures against *RPA*, measures that could be severe and could mean closure.

"The Security Council's statement, singling out a radio station just for doing its job of informing the population, is very disturbing," said Lucie Morillon, head of research and advocacy at Reporters Without Borders.

"The accusations of 'destabilizing public order' are all the most serious for coming at a time of political unrest and growing repression. The need is greater than ever for the authorities to guarantee freedom of expression and information and to protect the work of journalists."

Alexandre Niyungeko, the president of the Union of Burundian Journalists (UBJ), has called on the CNC's new members "not to succumb to the temptations of some who, by means of public statements, would like to abuse their political position to indulge their desire to clamp down on Burundi's media."

Morillon added: "We support the UBJ's position and we strongly urge the National Communication Council to play its role as media regulator, to consider its actions carefully and to not exceed its powers under government pressure."

Among the accusations that the Security Council levelled against *RPA* is broadcasting reports on 8 March that were "likely to foment disobedience and insurrection among the Burundian people."

*RPA*'s reporters provided live coverage of violent clashes between police and members of the opposition Solidarity and Development Movement (MSD) at its headquarters in the capital, Bujumbura, during which policemen were temporarily kidnapped and demonstrators were wounded and arrested.

After the clashes, the MSD was accused of "insurrection" and was suspended on 14 March for four months, while its president, Alexis Sinduhije, who is facing a possible life sentence on an insurrection charge, went into hiding. His location is still unknown.

Another Burundian radio station, *Isanganiro*, quoted *RPA* director Eric Manirakiza as saying his station had just done "its job of providing information" for which the Security Council "should send it a message of congratulation."

He added that *RPA* "helped Burundians and even foreigners to find out what was really happened in real time and had dispelled rumours" and that "today the rights of citizens can no longer be violated behind closed doors."

The international community has condemned the clashes between police and opposition activists. On 12 March, the European Union expressed concern about the "increase in political

tension” while the US State Department deplored the use of excessive force. The next day UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon condemned the “growing restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly.”

*RPA* has long been a thorn in the government’s side because it does not hesitate to cover sensitive stories and criticize the ruling party. Its reporting has been subject of reprisals in the past.

**Clarisse Irakoze**, an *RPA* journalist, and two *Radio Télé Renaissance* journalists, **Prime Gahinja** and **Alexandre Bizoza**, were beaten by police and ruling party activists in the northwestern province of Cibitoke on 30 August while covering Sinduhije’s interception by the police while on his way to a meeting with supporters.

Burundi is ranked 142nd out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#), nine places lower than its position in the 2013 index.

---