

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/journalist-held-for-deceiving-20-07-2012,43075.html>

Africa - Rwanda

Bizarre confession

Journalist held for “deceiving intelligence services” and “inventing abduction”

20 July 2012

Reporters Without Borders calls for the immediate release of **Idriss Gasana Byiringiro**, a journalism student and reporter for the newspaper *Chronicles*, who has been held for the past 72 hours on charges of trying to “deceive the intelligence services” and fabricating his claim in an article that he was kidnapped and threatened last month.

Detained at the Kicukiro district police station in the Rwandan capital of Kigali, Byiringiro has not been allowed to receive any visits since his arrest on 17 July.

“Establishing whether Byiringiro’s article was professional and objective or whether he lied is one thing, but if the intelligence services disputed what he wrote, did they have no alternative but to arrest him?” Reporters Without Borders asked. “Using their right of reply in *Chronicles* would have been more than enough. Why were they so quick to arrest him and then prevent him from seeing a lawyer or his family?”

In his article, which was in the form of an open letter, Byiringiro said he was kidnapped on 15 June by four armed men who confiscated his computer and mobile phone and interrogated him throughout the night about his sources before releasing him the next day. He indicated that he thought the intelligence services were responsible.

In the weeks since then, he said he had received threatening messages. After the newspaper’s editor filed a complaint, Byiringiro was asked to go to the police to give a statement. He was arrested when he went.

After being held for two days without being able to see his family, lawyer or fellow journalists, he reportedly gave a statement yesterday to certain news media in which he confessed to fabricating the abduction story.

The pro-government *New Times* newspaper quoted him as saying: “This was my plan. As a journalism student, I wanted to investigate if this profession is feasible in Rwanda or if it is true that the government harasses journalists, as indicated in international reports.”

It is hard to give Byiringiro’s confession much credence when he is being held without being able to see a lawyer and could easily have been intimidated into making it.

Three other journalists are currently detained in Rwanda:

- [Habarugira Epaphrodite](#) has been held since 24 April for allegedly minimizing the 1994 genocide. When his trial began on 18 July, a prosecutor requested a six-year jail sentence and a fine of 200,000 Rwandan francs. The verdict is due on 30 July.
- [Agnès Uwimana Nkusi](#) and [Saidat Mukakibibi](#) have been detained since 8 July 2010 on a range of charges including minimizing the genocide.

Rwanda is ranked 156th out of 179 countries in the 2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index, while President [Paul Kagamé](#) is on the Reporters Without Borders list of Predators of Press Freedom.

Photo : Idriss Gasana Byiringiro (The New Times/B. Asimwe)

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