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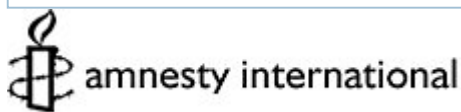
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Burundi: Media clampdown intensifies in aftermath of coup attempt

10 June 2015, 14:48 UTC

Escalating threats against journalists and other media workers in the past week are worrying signs that journalism in Burundi has become increasingly dangerous since an attempted coup last month, Amnesty International warned today.

Media freedom and coverage is critical to provide accurate information given the electoral impasse triggered by President Pierre Nkurunziza's bid for a third term, as well as growing fears of renewed conflict with wider regional implications.

"The intimidation is real and has sparked a climate of fear among journalists. If the police are shooting peaceful protesters, journalists must be able to report that. If Burundian citizens are fleeing the country, journalists should be free to report that too," said Sarah Jackson, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for East Africa, the Horn, and the Great Lakes.

"Burundians have a right to information about government activities including the stalled electoral process and mediation efforts to forestall renewed conflict in the region."

Recent threats and restrictions

On 6 June, David Thomson, a Radio France International (RFI) journalist, received threatening phone calls and a text message from senior Burundian officials. The communications referred to a policeman's murder of RFI journalist Jean Hélène in Côte d'Ivoire in 2003.

The previous day, photojournalists who were covering a demonstration told Amnesty International that policemen informed them that they would be "dealt with as if they were coup plotters" and that their mere presence on the ground was triggering demonstrations.

And on 4 June, Burundian authorities withdrew the accreditation of France 24 journalist Thaïs Brouck, stating that he failed to cover the elections process according to the terms of his accreditation letter. An official also told him that his presence in Burundi was inciting people to demonstrate.

Local journalists and bloggers have also been threatened by the police, intelligence and *Imbonerakure*, the youth wing of the ruling party National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD).

"These disturbing attacks on the press indicate the Burundian authorities' intolerance of freedom of expression, media freedom and the right to information. The government must show its commitment to these human rights by allowing both local and international journalists to operate freely and safely," said Sarah Jackson.

“Failure to do so violates international and regional norms on freedom of expression, as well those enshrined in Burundi’s constitution.”

Destruction of Burundian media outlets

International media outlets are the last resort for people in Burundi to access independent reporting about events in the country, after five private radio stations were partially or completely destroyed during the unrest in Bujumbura on 13 and 14 May 2015 following an attempted coup.

On 14 May, Radio Bonesha, Radio Isanganiro, Radio Publique Africaine (RPA), Rema FM and Radio-Télévision Renaissance were largely destroyed when they were attacked by unidentified individuals. They have not broadcast since.

Previously on 26 April, the Burundian authorities had banned the independent private radios RPA, Bonesha FM and Radio Isanganiro from broadcasting outside Bujumbura.

Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists as well as attacks on local independent radio stations.

The organization urges the Burundian authorities to speed up investigations into the destruction of media houses and bring to justice anyone suspected to be responsible.

“We call on the region as well as the rest of the international community to closely monitor the deteriorating human rights situation in Burundi, including the lack of enjoyment of the right to seek, receive and impart information,” said Sarah Jackson.

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