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Attacks on the Press in 2011 - Rwanda

Key Developments

- Two independent journalists receive heavy prison sentences.
- Director of independent weekly flees the country as a press exodus continues.

Authorities pursued an aggressive legal assault against critical journalists, using laws that ban insults against public officials and abusing anti-genocide laws to silence independent voices. President Paul Kagame's close relations with Western governments continued to shield him from criticism over his administration's poor press freedom record. In February, a panel of High Court judges sentenced two editors of the now-closed independent weekly *Umurabyo* to lengthy prison terms on charges of "genocidal ideology" related to articles detailing ethnic divisions in the security forces. In June, the Supreme Court sentenced in absentia Jean-Bosco Gasasira, editor of the independent *Umuwugizi*, to a prison term of two and a half years on insult charges stemming from an opinion piece that unfavorably compared Kagame to Zimbabwean leader Robert Mugabe. Gasasira had fled the country in 2010, joining one of the region's largest press diasporas. Another independent weekly editor, Nelson Gatsimbazi, fled the country in September, also fearing imprisonment. The government's aggressive actions left a subdued and largely state-dominated press landscape. A small number of critical websites remained, but they were subjected to regular government blocking.

[Refworld note: The sections that follow represent a best effort to transcribe onto a single page information that appears in tabs on the CPJ's own pages, which also include a number of graphics not readily reproducible here. Refworld researchers are therefore

strongly recommended to check against the original report: [Attacks on the Press in 2011.](#)

In exile, 2001-11: 18

Facing prison sentences and harassment, Rwandan independent journalists have steadily fled the country.

79 Ethiopia
68 Somalia
66 Iran
55 Iraq
49 Zimbabwe
47 Eritrea
25 Sri Lanka
25 Cuba
20 Colombia
18 Haiti
18 Rwanda
18 Uzbekistan
17 Gambia

Imprisoned on December 1, 2011: 2

High Court judges sentenced Agnès Uwimana, editor of *Umurabyo*, to 17 years in prison and Saidati Mukakibibi, the weekly's deputy editor, to seven years.

Suspensions of outlets, 2007-11: 7

Whether ordered by the state or self-imposed, local and international media houses have faced suspensions. Some have been as short as one month, but others have been indefinite.

June 2007: Information Minister Laurent Nkusi suspended the license of the independent *Weekly Post* on vague allegations that it used false documents in its license application. The paper, in circulation for one issue, never published again.

October 2007: The Rwanda Independent Media Group, publisher of three weeklies, suspended publication for two weeks to protest remarks by two ministers claiming the company worked for "opposition forces."

March 2008: The Media High Council issued a one-year suspension to the independent Kinyarwandan weekly, *Umuco*, for insulting Kagame.

April 2009: The government suspended the BBC's Kinyarwandan programming for a month on trumped-up anti-genocide charges.

April 2010: The state-run Media High Council suspended the independent weeklies *Umuseso* and *Umuwugizi* for six months for insulting Kagame.

August 2011: The Kinyarwandan-language independent bimonthly *Ishema* suspended publication for a month after getting threats concerning an opinion piece that called Kagame a "sociopath."

Major defamation cases,

Public officials and prominent business figures have used criminal and civil defamation complaints and a politicized judiciary to silence independent journalists, CPJ research shows. In the seven major defamation cases heard in the past four years, the press has lost every time.

Internet penetration, 2010: 7.7%

Data from the International Telecommunication Union show that Rwandan Internet use, while inching upward, still lags behind East African countries such as Kenya, where penetration is about 21 percent, and Uganda, where it stands at about 12.5 percent.