

URGENT ACTION

BURUNDIAN NEWS EDITOR RELEASED FROM PRISON

Jean-Claude Kavumbagu, the editor of a Burundian online news agency, *Netpress*, was released from prison on 16 May 2011. He had been detained since July 2010 after suggesting that the Burundian security forces could not defend the country.

Jean-Claude Kavumbagu had published an article on 12 July 2010, one day after suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda, criticizing the capacity of Burundian security forces to protect the country from a terrorist attack. Somali Islamist armed group, al-Shabaab, claimed responsibility for the bombings in Uganda.

He was arrested on 17 July 2010, charged with treason, defamation and violating Burundi's press law and transferred to Mpimba Central Prison, Bujumbura.

On Friday 13 May 2011, the High Court (Tribunal de Grande Instance) sentenced Jean-Claude Kavumbagu to 8 months in prison and a fine of 100,000 Burundian francs under Article 50 of the 2003 press law (Loi 27 Novembre 2003 régissant la presse au Burundi) for publishing "information likely to harm the assets of the state and the national economy" (« les informations susceptibles de porter atteinte au crédit de l'Etat et à l'économie nationale »). As he had already spent 10 months in prison, he was released from Mpimba prison on Monday 16 May 2011. All other charges, including treason, defamation and other press law violations were dropped.

Amnesty International welcomes his release. The organization remains concerned, however, that his prolonged pre-trial detention and conviction set a dangerous precedent for restrictions on freedom of expression in Burundi. During his detention, Amnesty International considered him to be a prisoner of conscience.

Jean-Claude's family have thanked Amnesty International members for their letters to the Burundian government calling for his immediate release.

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all those who sent appeals.

This is the first update of UA 248/10. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR16/004/2010/en>

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