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## **Burundi: Freedom of expression under threat from new press law**

A new press law that would severely limit the activities of journalists in Burundi poses a grave threat to freedom of expression, Amnesty International said today.

The draft law, which includes new press-related crimes and exorbitant fines for journalists who violate them, looks set to be signed off by Burundi's President after it was adopted by the country's Senate earlier this month.

The proposal restricts the right to report on anything relating to state and public security, as well as information that threatens the economy or "insults the President".

"Freedom of expression in Burundi is gravely under threat from this repressive law, which has great potential to be abused and places journalists at the mercy of the authorities," said Netsanet Belay, Amnesty International's Africa Director.

"President Pierre Nkurunziza must reject the draft, and ensure that journalists are able to carry out their legitimate work freely and without the threat of legal action."

Journalists in Burundi already face harassment, intimidation and arbitrary arrest for carrying out their work, yet the country has a vibrant media.

Journalists often carry out investigations into sensitive issues, sometimes placing themselves in danger, and report on allegations of human rights abuses and corruption.

The draft press law, in its latest form, could make journalists criminally liable for carrying out their work, and creates numerous new requirements for them to follow.

Failure to do so could lead to fines as high as 6,000,000 Burundian francs (about US \$3,760), which most media outlets would be unable to afford.

"The law places undue restrictions on journalists and puts them at risk of prosecution. Many of the new requirements are overly broad and could be used to restrict freedom of expression," said Netsanet Belay.

"Press freedom is precious to the people of Burundi and the president should do everything in his power to protect it, rather than stifle it."

The Burundian Senate adopted the law on 19 April and President Nkurunziza is scheduled to sign it shortly, after which it will become law.

Burundi's ruling party, the National Council for Defence of Democracy-Forces for Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), governs without any effective opposition, following the withdrawal of opposition parties from the 2010 elections.