

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

AI Index: AFR 47/002/2006 (Public)  
News Service No: 019  
23 January 2006

### Rwanda: Freedom of expression under attack

Amnesty International today expressed concerns for the safety of Bonaventure Bizumuremyi, the editor of the independent fortnightly newspaper, *Umuco*, who has recently been the target of intimidation, harassment and armed attack from assailants allegedly associated with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the ruling political party in Rwanda.

Bonaventure Bizumuremyi was reportedly woken up at 3 am on 15 January, by four men banging on the front door of his home in the capital, Kigali. The men, armed with clubs and knives, forcibly entered and ransacked his house.

The harassment of Bonaventure Bizumuremyi is linked with his work as a journalist, and as a result of his critical position of RPF. The latest editions of *Umuco* strongly criticized the government for its tight control of the judiciary, its coercion of local cooperatives to fund the RPF and its inability to run the country.

The right to freedom of expression and the right to seek, receive and impart information of any kinds are laid down in international standards such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Rwanda is a state party to both of these instruments and has an obligation to ensure freedom of expression and information. As stated in the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2002, "states are under an obligation to take effective measures to prevent such attacks and, when they do occur, to investigate them, to punish perpetrators and to ensure that victims have access to effective remedies".

It is the responsibility of the Rwandan Government to ensure that all journalists are allowed to work independently and free from attacks and fear of harassment and human rights abuse.

Amnesty International is calling on the Rwandan authorities to conduct independent and impartial investigations into all attacks or acts of intimidation against journalists, to publish the results of such investigations and bring those responsible to justice.

Amnesty International urges the Rwandan government to ensure the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression and act in line with its international human rights obligations.

Amnesty International also calls on the members of the international community, including the African Union and the United Nations, to urge the Rwandan authorities to end the continuing harassment and intimidation of journalists and human rights defenders.

## Background

The recent incidents of harassment and intimidation are part of a continuing pattern of media control in Rwanda. Over the last few years, other newspapers like *Umuseso* have also been subject to continued intimidation, harassment and prosecution.

The authorities have used various means to harass and intimidate Bonaventure Bizumuremyi, making it difficult to do his work as a journalist, as well as violating his internationally recognised human rights including the right to freedom of expression. Since September 2005, he has been detained and interrogated several times by the security services and put on trial for libel.

His colleague, Jean Léonard Rugabage, has been detained since 7 September 2005 on the grounds of alleged involvement in the 1994 genocide, a charge sometimes used to silence critics of the RPF. He was arrested only 10 days after writing an article alleging that judges of *gacaca* tribunals in Ruyumba used their position for personal gain and to settle personal feuds. *Gacaca* is a community-based system of tribunals established by the government in 2002 to try people suspected of crimes during the 1994 genocide.