

AI Index: PRE 01/273/2010  
05 August 2010

## **Rwanda: Pre-election attacks on politicians and journalists condemned**

Amnesty International condemns attacks on politicians and journalists in the run up to the presidential election on August 9 and calls on the government to ensure the poll is held in an atmosphere where Rwandans can freely express their views.

The murder of a journalist and an opposition politician – both critical of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) - in late June and mid-July has created a climate of repression likely to inhibit freedom of expression ahead of the vote, the organisation said.

“In recent months killings, arrests and the closure of newspapers and broadcasters has reinforced a climate of fear,” said Amnesty International’s Africa Programme Deputy Director, Tawanda Hondora. “The Rwandan government must ensure that investigations into the killings are thorough and reinstate closed media outlets.”

On 14 July, André Kagwa Rwisereka, the vice president of the opposition Democratic Green Party, was found dead in Butare, southern Rwanda. Amnesty International has obtained photographs that show that his head was severed from his body.

Rwisereka, who left the RPF to create the Green Party, had reportedly been concerned for his security in the weeks before his murder. Other Green Party members said they had also received threats .

Investigations into Rwisereka’s death continue, but insufficient evidence has been gathered to press charges, according to the Prosecution.

None of the main opposition parties are able to stand in Monday’s elections. The Democratic Green Party of Rwanda and FDU-Inkingi have been obstructed from holding the meetings required to register their parties.

The only new opposition party to secure registration – PS-Imberakuri – was unable to stand after the party’s leader, Bernard Ntaganda, was arrested on June 24. Ntaganda was charged with “genocide ideology” and “divisionism” under vague laws, ostensibly used to restrict hate speech, but often used to silence legitimate dissent.

Opposition leader, Victoire Ingabire, has still not been brought to trial on charges of “genocide ideology”, “minimising the genocide”, “divisionism” and “collaborating with a terrorist group” following her arrest in April. In May, the Prosecution said that investigations may take up to a year, ruling out a trial before the elections.

“Until an independent enquiry into Rwisereka’s murder reveals the true circumstances surrounding his death,

Rwandans will fear that it was linked to his opposition activities,” said Tawanda Hondora. “They may be reluctant to express themselves as a result.”

Jean-Leonard Rugambage, a journalist working for the Umuvugizi newspaper, was shot dead on June 24 outside his home in the capital, Kigali. Rugambage had been investigating the shooting in South Africa of the exiled former general, Kayumba Nyamwasa. On the day of his murder, Umuvugizi published a story alleging that Rwandan intelligence officials were linked to Nyamwasa’s shooting.

Two suspects have been arrested for Rugambage’s murder and are currently awaiting trial.

Rwandan media critical of the government has effectively been dismantled in the run-up to elections. In late July, the Rwandan High Media Council, a regulatory body close to the ruling party, banned some 30 media outlets arguing they failed to adhere to a 2009 media law. The law restricts media freedom.

Agnes Nkusi Uwimana, the editor of the Urubayo newspaper, was arrested in July and charged with “genocide ideology”. Two other newspaper editors fled Rwanda in recent months after their papers were suspended and they received repeated threats.

The United Nations, the European Union, the United States, France and Spain have already publicly expressed concerns about the deteriorating human rights situation in Rwanda ahead of the election. Amnesty International calls on other countries to also express their concerns.

“No country should be a silent witness to pre-electoral repression”, said Tawanda Hondora. “Speaking out about violations is the best way to ensure that the next Rwandan administration respects human rights.”