

FREE RUSESABAGINA

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Journalists Under Siege In Rwanda

CHICAGO -- Journalists being told they are the “enemy of the state” for their dedication to facts and truth-telling is a new experience in the U.S., but in Rwanda it has been open season on reporters for decades. Journalists who report about the ongoing human rights violations committed by President Paul Kagame’s government continue to do so knowing they may face physical threats, be forced to leave the country, or be murdered at home.

“Kagame’s assault on Rwanda’s free press has left only a single voice in the country -- his own. This is particularly chilling since it mirrors the government’s control of Rwandan media before the 1994 genocide. By silencing political, journalistic, and civil society voices, Kagame exercises near-total control of the country, creating the conditions for new violence,” according to Author Anjan Sundaram.

The data and stories that Sundaram and different organizations are actually able to collect tell a chilling story.

- According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), in Rwanda [eight journalists have been killed or reported missing, and 35 have had to flee abroad](#) since 1996.
- The Committee to Protect Journalists list the names and circumstances surrounding the [17 journalists murdered in Rwanda](#) between 1992-2020.
- And one of the most recent comprehensive looks at the network of fear that established and aspiring young reporters face in Rwanda can be found in Sundaram’s 2016’s [Bad News: Last Journalists in a Dictatorship](#). The appendix contains a list of 75 innocent journalists attacked, killed, or forced to flee Rwanda after they criticized Kagame. It is a damning list.

The 2010 murder of Rwanda journalist [Jean-Léonard Rugambage](#) is a prime example of the sacrifices the press makes to report the truth. Rugambage was the acting editor of the newspaper Umuvugizi, which had been suspended by the government for being critical of the regime. However, he continued to post articles online including one about the attempted murder of a former Rwanda army official who was an outspoken critic of President Paul Kagame.

Even Rwandan journalists living in exile are not safe from retribution. Reporter [Charles Ingabire](#) was gunned down in Uganda in 2011. He ran an online publication called Inyenyeri News that was critical of the government of Rwanda.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) provides a snapshot of the media landscape in Rwanda:

“The number of abuses registered by RSF has fallen in recent years, but censorship is ubiquitous and self-censorship is widely used to avoid running afoul of the regime. Foreign journalists are often unable to obtain the visas and accreditation they need to report in Rwanda. Despite a new media law in 2010 and efforts to develop Internet connections throughout the country, the legislation is very oppressive. An overhaul of the penal code in 2018 did not reform prison sentences for journalists convicted of insult or defamation. The spectre of the 1994 genocide is still used to brand media critical of the government as ‘divisionist.’ In 2015, the government banned *BBC radio* broadcasting in the local Kinyarwanda language after a *BBC TV* documentary referred to the deaths that took place during the advance on Kigali in 1994 by Rwandan Patriotic Front rebels led by Paul Kagame, now Rwanda’s president. Kagame’s reelection in August 2017, after a constitutional amendment allowed him to run for a third term, means that authoritarianism and censorship are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.”

Paul Rusesabagina has consistently called out the Kagame regime for its abusive practices toward journalists and the assault on freedom of speech in Rwanda. This is one of the real reasons that Rusesabagina has been kidnapped and arrested in Kigali.

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