

Rwanda Shuts Down Independent Press

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On April 13, 2010, President Paul Kagame and Rwanda's High Media Council suspended independent Kinyarwanda language newspapers Umuseso and Umuvugizi at a press conference attended only by state broadcasters and the pro-government radio station Contact FM.

The High Media Council accused Umuseso of insulting Rwandan President Paul Kagame, inciting the police and army to insubordination, and frightening the public. The council is a nominally independent body heavily influenced by the government.

The six-month suspension will ensure that neither of the independent papers can cover this year's presidential election with polls scheduled August 9th. Both criticize Kagame's ruling [Rwanda Patriotic Front Party](#).

[Umuvuzi](#) Editor Jean Bosco Gasasira said, "Almost 70% of Rwandans speak only Kinyarwanda, not English or French, and only 3% have internet access, so without these tabloid newspapers, they will have no independent news for the next six months. All they will know of the election is what the government newspapers tell them."

"By silencing these two local-language newspapers the Media High Council is robbing Rwandan voters of crucial alternative voices during the presidential election campaign," said Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) Africa Program Coordinator Tom Rhodes.. "The ruling is a thinly disguised attempt at censorship. If the election is to be seen as free and fair, the council must reverse this ruling and ensure that all media are able to cover the campaign."

The council can legally suspend a weekly publication for a maximum of two weeks unless the paper is seen as a repeat offender, but this is a six-month suspension.

Several hours after the High Media Council announced the suspension of Umuseso and Umuvugizi, President Kagame said, at a speech in Rwanda's Parliament:

"These newspapers have to stop, WILLINGLY or ELSE! That's a promise I'm making you and it will happen. They have no right here, regardless of how the international community sees it or understands it. Let them believe whatever they want. And if they don't like it, let them take those journalists in. They have no place here."

(Translated from the BBC-Rwanda's Kinyarwanda language broadcast, by Robert Karenzi.)

However, in his commemoration address at the Genocide Memorial Center in Rwanda's

capital, Kigali, on April 7th, President Kagame said he didn't give a damn about critics, whom he said were abusing him by calling for political space and press freedom, even calling him "Hitler."

An audio clip of President Kagame's remarks on press freedom can be heard by clicking [here](#). The entire English language portion of his address can be heard by clicking [here](#).

On Wednesday, April 14th, AFP reported that the [telephones at both newspapers had been switched off](#).

CPJ's Tom Rhoades said that, "CPJ is also worried that the editors of these papers are under intense surveillance and are at risk. [Umuwugizi Editor Jean Bosco Gasasira was brutally beaten with iron bars in 2007](#), and had to be rushed into intensive care."

Umuseso Editor Didas Gasana contacted Digital Journal on April 13th, with the news that his paper had been suspended. Gasana traveled to Kampala, Uganda on the 14th, but said that he planned to return to Kigali next week. Umuseso Editor Charles Kabonero is living in exile in South Africa.

Déo Mushayidi, former President of the Rwanda Journalists' Association, and co-author of [Les Secrets du Genocide Rwandais](#), remains in a Rwandan prison, charged with terrorism, after his arrest in Burundi on March 6th, 2010.

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