

WAN-IFRA Board Press Freedom Resolution – Rwanda, 2019

The Board of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), meeting in Glasgow, Scotland on 3rd June, 2019 during the 71st World News Media Congress, 26th World Editors Forum, and 3rd Women in News Summit, calls for renewed global solidarity with the Rwandan press in the wake of attacks and the hardening government stance against independent, free media.

The Board of WAN-IFRA denounces a systematic campaign by the government of Rwanda to stifle critical voices through a combination of brazen and covert tactics of censorship. The Board notes how gains in economic development made under president Paul Kagame have not been matched by efforts to ensure journalists can work without fear of reprisal. Press freedom must be included in the sustainable development of Rwanda.

The Board is outraged by Rwanda's detention of at least four journalists, three of which – [Damascene Mutuyimana](#), [Jean Baptiste Nshimiyimana](#), and [Shadrack Niyonsenga](#)—work for [Iwacu TV](#), and the fourth, [Phocas Ndayizera](#), contributed to the BBC's Kinyarwanda and Kirundi services. The crimes they have been accused of range from spreading rumors to terrorism. The Board notes with concern the chilling effect that the arrest and imprisonment of journalists for their work has on a media environment, as well as the human cost of denying these individual reporters their freedom.

The Board additionally regrets to acknowledge the banning in 2014 and continued inaccessibility of BBC's Kinyarwanda service, as well as the impermissibility of reporting outside government lines about the 1994 genocide or political opposition and diaspora-based rebel movements. The Board denounces the pervasive culture of self-censorship in Rwanda, which has been [acknowledged](#) by the Rwanda Media Commission.

The Board acknowledges the removal of sections from Rwanda's criminal code pertaining to criminal defamation and a subsequent court decision to decriminalize the drawing of cartoons that "humiliate" Rwandan officials. However, the board notes with concern the maintenance of insult to the president as a criminal offence, despite president Kagame's public assertion that defamation should be a purely civil matter.

It also notes with concern the [passing](#) in 2018 of legislation that provides authorities additional surveillance powers, which may be used against journalists reporting on corruption, security, or other matters of public interest. Rwanda should take action to decriminalize all press offenses and ensure journalists are not the targets of surveillance.

The Board is gravely concerned about the use of unofficial detention facilities, [documented](#) by the Committee to Protect Journalists, where journalists have been interrogated for days, as well as the prevailing impunity for killings of journalists in Rwanda. It regrets to acknowledge that since 1992, 17 journalists have been [killed](#) in connection with their work and in 15 of their cases, no one has been held accountable.

The Board of WAN-IFRA reminds Rwanda of its obligations as a signatory to international conventions regarding freedom of expression, and it unequivocally calls on Rwanda's international partners to do more to pressure President Kagame's government into guaranteeing an environment that better protects media freedom and the independence of journalists.