



RWANDA DOMESTIC MEDIA MONITOR REPORT FOR THE WEEK OF: JULY 26TH-AUGUST 2ND, 2011



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A. TABLOID APOLOGIZES TO PRESIDENT AFTER DEFAMATORY ARTICLE

Rwanda News Agency (RNA)—29 July: Tabloid says “sorry” to President Kagame over defamation (privately-owned source)

In an unprecedented move, the editor of a Rwandan tabloid has printed an issue dedicated to apologizing to President Paul Kagame after publishing a story last week in which he describes the President as a “sociopath”. Mr. Fidele Gakire, the editor of the tabloid ISHEMA, received a ‘barrage of criticism’ for the story that ran in issue no. 24—in which he accuses the President of corruption and heading a dictatorship—which led him to publicly apologize in his publication as well as with an open letter (also sent to RNA). In the letter, Gakire says his intention was not to undermine the person of the President.

The backlash to the story from various entities has been severe. The Forum of Private Newspapers (FPN), the body to which ISHEMA belonged, issued Gakire with a six-month suspension; Mr. Adrien Seruvumba, a “concerned citizen”, has petitioned the Media High Council (MHC) to punish the tabloid; and on Wednesday, ISHEMA’s deputy editor, Didace Niyinfasha resigned, accusing Gakire of publishing the issue behind his back.

According to MHC Executive Secretary, Patrice Mulama, Gakire will be summoned by the governing body next week, which is allowed under the 2009 Media law once a petition has been submitted. The MHC now has the power to suspend or even ban the publication altogether.

The ISHEMA incident will be the first time a newspaper has criticized President Kagame and subsequently issued a public apology. Previous tabloid editors who publicly spoke out against the President have chosen to defend their articles, referencing their right to personal opinion under the constitution.



Photo: courtesy of RNA website (<http://www.rnanews.com/politics/5194-tabloid-says-sorry-to-president-kagame-over-defamation>)

B. PARLIAMENT PASSES SET OF MEDIA FREEDOM LAWS

ORINFOR—02 August: Parliament endorses 3 media-related laws (state-owned source)

Members of the Rwandan Parliament today endorsed 3 laws designed to facilitate the practice of journalism in the country. The three laws include: the revised Media Law, the law governing the structure and function of a modified Media High Council, and the law governing the transition of ORINFOR from state-run to a public broadcaster under the name ‘Rwanda Broadcasting Agency’ (RBA).

In his speech to Parliament on the subject, Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Protais Musoni, outlined some of the changes contained in the new laws, including the removal of the media law article requiring all journalists to be accredited by the Media High Council. Henceforth, journalists will be given their registration cards by the media organizations for which they work.

According to ORINFOR, MPs expressed concern over whether the media is able to regulate itself—which these reforms brings the industry a step closer to doing—considering the ‘many mistakes’ that have characterized the media of late.

ORINFOR—01 August: A review of media law underway in Parliament (state-owned source)

Rwanda’s 2009 Media Law is scheduled for review in Parliament this week, with the major amendment being the potential self-regulation of the newspaper industry. The proposed bill would lift 24 previous restrictions on the establishment of media outlets, including the requirement for accreditation from the Media High Council (MHC) for anybody to become a journalist. To this point, one article was added to the new bill, expressly stating, “print media shall largely regulate itself.”

The review follows a three-day retreat attended by media professionals and journalists in an effort to establish plans for a non-state supervisory body for the media. Among the issues on the table is the replacement of state broadcaster ORINFOR with the private sector Rwanda Broadcasting Agency.

The New Times website—28 July: Govt to set up communications regulatory body (privately-owned, pro-government source)

The Rwanda Media Sector Reform Committee announced after its meeting this week the need to create a communications regulatory body in the country. Still in the nascent stages of discussion, the body will be set up separately from the Rwanda Utility Regulatory Agency, and will be charged with the regulation of the communications sector including Telecoms, ICT, and the media.

According to Director General of the Office of the Prime Minister, Ignatius Kabagambe, “the committee agreed that the regulation of media and communication sector is too broad to be mixed with the regulation of other utilities like water and electricity”, for the sake of efficiency.

The meeting also centered around discussion of the transformation of ORINFOR into a public broadcaster, as well as the three media-related laws—the Access to Information bill, the revised Media Law, and the Rwanda Broadcasting Agency law—currently before Parliament.

C. UGANDAN PRESIDENT TOURS RWANDA, SIGNS TRADE MOUS

ORINFO—01 August: *President Museveni: Rwanda and Uganda have brotherly relations* (**state-owned source**)

After a four-day state visit to Rwanda, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni held a press conference in which he praised the country for its “tremendous progress”. His visit to Rwanda has been described as a sign of warm relations based on cooperation, shared culture, and diplomacy between the two East African nations. During his visit, four Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) were signed by the latter and President Kagame in trade sectors including ICT, environment management, coffee development, and agricultural research. During his visit President Museveni repeatedly stressed that Rwandans and Ugandans are one people, and that they have—and should continue to—support each other over time, stating, “On the political side, there have been chains of cooperation, when the people of RPF (Rwanda Patriotic Front) had problems here, they worked with us. Along the way there were some issues...which we have transcended.”

The Monitor—29 July: *Nation, Rwanda rebuilds bridges as Museveni visits* (**privately-owned Ugandan source**)

President Museveni’s visit to Rwanda is not simply a routine diplomatic formality; rather, it is a “renewed attempt to rebuild a relationship that remains vulnerable to rumors and suspicion.” Relations between the two countries have been strained over the last several years due to ongoing fighting in the DR Congo, allegations of sponsoring political rivals, and a 2009 incident in which—upon receiving an award for his role in ending the 1994 Genocide—President Museveni failed to give sufficient recognition to President Kagame in a speech. One particular issue of contention centers around the two exiled Rwandan army officers, Kayumba Nyamwasa and Patrick Karegeya, whom Rwandan security officials claim have been given audience by Uganda. Upon meeting Rwanda’s High Commissioner to Uganda, Museveni clarified that Kampala does not support any officials opposed to Rwanda.

President Kagame and President Museveni have a long-standing relationship, one that can be traced back to when they fought in the 1981-1986 Bush war together.

D. MISCELLANEOUS

The New Times website—31 July: *State joins UNHCR Executive Committee* (**privately-owned, pro-government source**)

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) unanimously approved Rwanda’s request to become a member of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Presently, the Executive Committee is in the process of enlarging its membership from 85 to 87, with Azerbaijan also awaiting admittance. According to Chargé d’Affaires of the Rwandan Embassy in Geneva, Alphonse Kayitayire, “As a party to the 1951 Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees and following its experience in the management of refugee issues, Rwanda wants to strengthen its international cooperation in this area.”

In 2009, the UNHCR High Commission for Refugees announced the invocation, in Rwanda’s case, of the Cessation Clause, given the country’s tremendous socio-economic progress and security. This means that the retention of refugee status by Rwandan refugees will be no longer justifiable; currently, the government of Rwanda and the UNHCR are working out a ‘road map’ of actions that will lead to the invocation of the Clause, which is scheduled to come into effect at the end of 2011.