



## Radio silence

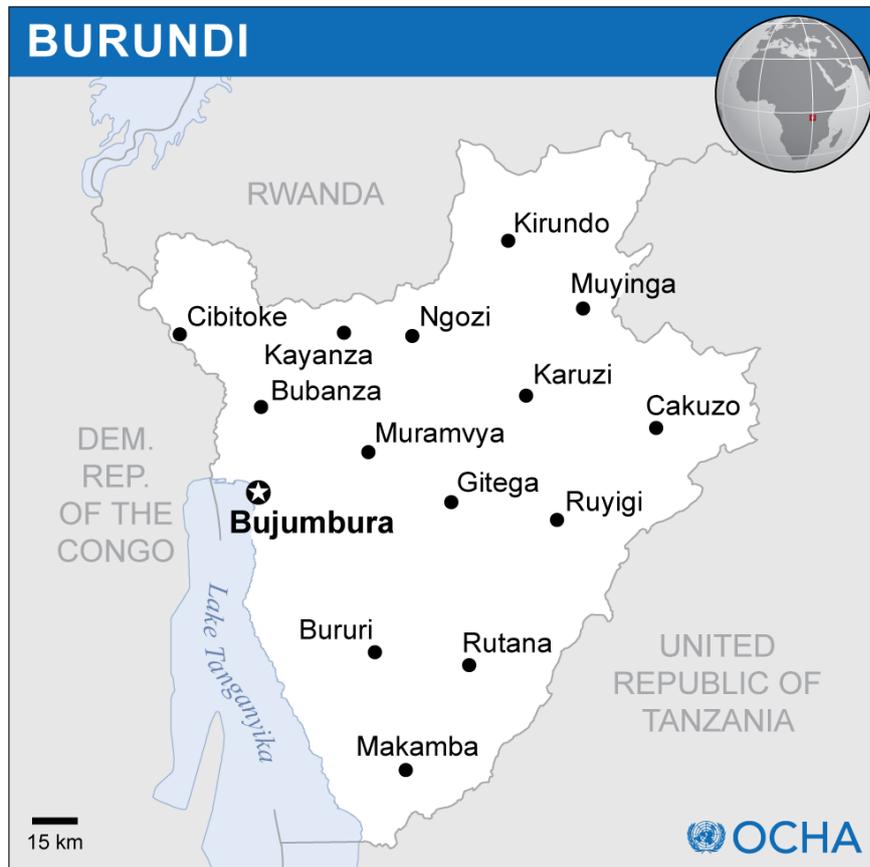
# Burundi's media during the 2015 election crisis

ims

INTERNATIONAL  
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## Map of Burundi



Map courtesy of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

## Acronyms

ABJ	Association Burundaise des Journalistes (Burundi Association of Journalists)
ABP	Agence Burundaise de Presse
ABR	Association Burundaise des Radiodiffuseurs (Burundi Association of Radios)
AFJO	Association des Femmes Journalistes (Association of Women Journalists)
ARJ	Association of Rwandan Journalists
AU	African Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CNC	National Communication Council
CNDD-FDD	National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (ruling party)
CENI	Independent National Electoral Commission
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAC	East African Community
EU	European Union
IDP	Internally displaced person
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MPB	Maison de la Presse du Burundi
OPB	Observatoire de la Presse Burundaise (Burundi Press Observatory)
PGL	Panos Grands Lacs
RFI	Radio France Internationale
RPA	Radio Publique Africaine
RTNB	Radiotélévision Nationale Burundaise
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
UBJ	Union of Burundian Journalists
VOA	Voice of America

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# Introduction

This desk study was commissioned by International Media Support (IMS) for the purposes of providing information to colleagues in the media support sector and to donors so that they may be better informed when devising and deciding on appropriate intervention strategies.

IMS adviser Michelle Betz was tasked with the assessment and the recommendations and was cognisant of the ever-changing situation on the ground in Burundi; readers of this report should bear the fluidity of the situation in mind.

Research for this report was conducted from 15 – 23 June 2015 and was based on interviews with journalists and other actors in both Burundi and Rwanda. In addition, news and other reports were consulted.

IMS will continue to monitor the situation on the ground and will provide an updated version of this report shortly after the scheduled presidential elections in July 2015.

## 1. Context

*“The land of a thousand hills is now the land of a thousand rumours.”*

– Burundian journalist

Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world, landlocked and resource-poor, its history echoes Rwanda's and in some ways is inextricably entwined with its northern neighbor. Yet unlike its more successful neighbors, Burundi is one of the poorest and hungriest countries in the world. Burundi is the second most densely populated country in Africa after neighboring Rwanda.

As in Rwanda, Burundi's Belgian colonial government exacerbated an ethnic divide between Hutus and Tutsis. After the country gained independence in 1962, a series of Tutsi strongmen ruled and the subsequent decades were marked by periods of ethnic violence. In October 1993, the country's first democratically president, Melchior Ndadaye, a Hutu, was assassinated. His death triggered massacres of Tutsis, followed by revenge killings of Hutus. Twelve years of civil war between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority ended a decade ago and had given the country relative stability. The 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation agreement helped end the country's long civil war.

In 2005, former Hutu rebel leader Pierre Nkurunziza was elected president on a populist platform. His party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) has near total control of the government, after most opposition parties

dropped out of the last presidential election, in 2010, citing fraud. International observers, however, deemed the election mostly free and fair.<sup>1</sup>

In April 2014, the U.N. warned of the possibility of international prosecution if human-rights abuses, including unsolved killings and violence by armed party-affiliated youth gangs (Imbonerakure) continued.<sup>2</sup> “The CNDD-FDD leadership is so power-hungry and insecure that it wants to reduce the political space as much as it can before the 2015 elections,” says Thierry Vircoulon, the International Crisis Group’s project director for Central Africa.<sup>3</sup>

On 26 January 2015, media reports suggested that over 300 civil society organizations initiated a campaign named as “Halte au troisieme mandat” (Stop a Third Mandate) to prevent Presidential Nkurunziza from running for a third term. Opposition parties, the Church and some international actors have strongly warned against a third term option from Nkurunziza, saying that it would violate the Arusha agreement.<sup>4</sup>

Civil unrest erupted on 26 April in Bujumbura after the ruling CNDD-FDD party elected President Pierre Nkurunziza on 25 April as its candidate for the 26 June presidential election. On 26 April, the Burundian authorities banned the independent private radios Radio Publique Africaine (RPA), Bonesha FM and Radio Isanganiro from broadcasting outside Bujumbura. Nkurunziza has been in office for two terms since 2005, and a broad array of actors warned that an attempt to seek a third term was unconstitutional and contrary to the spirit of the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi that ended a decade of civil war in the country. Despite an appeal by the Senate, Burundi’s Constitutional Court determined that President Nkurunziza was eligible for re-election – although the Court’s deputy president fled to Rwanda prior to this decision. A coup d’état was subsequently launched on 13 May in Bujumbura while President Nkurunziza was at an East African Community Summit in Tanzania intended to try to resolve the current crisis in Burundi. The coup was rapidly thwarted, and President Nkurunziza returned to the country.<sup>5</sup>

In a decree issued on 9 June 2015, President Nkurunziza approved a new electoral timetable as proposed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI).<sup>6</sup> Parliamentary and local elections will be held on 29 June, followed by the presidential election on 15 July and senatorial elections on 24 July. The opposition has rejected the new election dates, claiming that CENI was not able to function due to the resignation of two out of its five members. Furthermore, Nkurunziza’s bid for a third term -- the issue that sparked the recent political turmoil -- has not been addressed; therefore, the situation remains volatile and further unrest should be expected.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/burundi/169-burundi-from-electoral-boycott-to-political-impasse.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/10/us-burundi-un-idUSBREA3923Q20140410>

<sup>3</sup> <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/4/19/snap-crackle-hissthesoundofdemocracyinburundi.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/interagency-contingency-plan-burundi-2015-elections>

<sup>5</sup> OCHA, Burundi Flash Update #12, 11 June 2015. Elections Crisis and Regional Impact.

<sup>6</sup> [http://presidence.gov.bi/IMG/pdf/decret\\_177.pdf](http://presidence.gov.bi/IMG/pdf/decret_177.pdf)

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In a decree dated 30 May<sup>7</sup> but made public mid-June, President Nkurunziza announced that the CENI could function with only three of its five members, two members having resigned and fled the country. Despite this, two new members were appointed in mid-June to replace those who had fled.

With a view to likely violence and problems regarding the scheduled elections, the UN developed the Interagency Contingency Plan: Burundi 2015 Elections in April 2015.<sup>8</sup> Ongoing violence coupled with fear of another civil war have, so far, resulted in more than 100,000 Burundians fleeing the country to refugee camps in neighboring Rwanda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The UN Contingency Plan had estimated that there would be 50,000 refugees and 250,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). The number of refugees has already doubled this estimate.

Some also say that civil society has not done enough to distance itself from the opposition. As Rowan Popplewell writes: "Civil society was at the forefront of protests that led to the coup attempt. The demonstrations and the coup that followed present civil society with a conundrum: can civil society protest against the Government on the streets of Bujumbura alongside members of opposition parties without being perceived as part of the political opposition? Experience from elsewhere in Africa and Eastern Europe shows that it is not easy to challenge the abuse of political power while being seen to remain above the fight for it, especially in divided contexts like Burundi...In a country where political opposition is weak and fragmented, these civil society groups are often regarded as the de-facto political opposition."<sup>9</sup>

By mid-June, the tactics of protestors had changed. In Musaga, in the southern part of Bujumbura, protestors are starting to make noise at certain times of the day: 12h30 and 19h00. These are the times the local news is usually broadcast on the major radio stations, now all silenced.<sup>10</sup> However, one week before the scheduled legislative elections, there were far fewer demonstrations than previously. One journalist said that grenade attacks are becoming more commonplace. In addition, donors have pulled out. The European Union (EU), Belgium and the Netherlands have already cut some aid, mainly related to supporting the elections. One week before the scheduled legislative elections the EU warned Burundi that it "might impose sanctions on those responsible for violence and consider other steps against the aid-reliant nation, plunged into turmoil by the president's plan to run for a third term".<sup>11</sup>

In another important development just days before the elections, Gervais Rufyikiri, the second Vice-President, resigned saying that he was against the third term which he said was unconstitutional. Rufyikiri has now fled the country after receiving threats.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [http://presidence.gov.bi/IMG/pdf/decret\\_171.pdf](http://presidence.gov.bi/IMG/pdf/decret_171.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/interagency-contingency-plan-burundi-2015-elections>

<sup>9</sup> <http://intrac.org/blog.php/97/burundi-unrest-can-civil-society-challenge-the-abuse-of-power-while-remaining-above-the-fight#sthash.5QW5JKk3.dpuf>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.isanganiro.org/spip.php?article9352&utm\\_source=twitterfeed&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://www.isanganiro.org/spip.php?article9352&utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter)

<sup>11</sup> [http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN0P30KZ20150623?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN0P30KZ20150623?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33267428>

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## 2. Media landscape in Burundi

*"We are in a media blackout."*

– Cyprien Ndikumana, Panos Grands Lacs

### 2.1 Radio

Radio is the primary source of news throughout the country with nineteen privately owned radio stations; however, the government runs Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi (RTNB), the sole television and radio stations with national reach, and *Le Renouveau*, the only newspaper that publishes regularly.

Radio Burundi, the government-controlled radio and the only news and information radio station still on the air, broadcasts in Kirundi (the local language), Swahili, French and English. It also operates an educational network.

Nineteen radio stations normally operate in Burundi, and in 2010, nearly 90 percent of the people reported having access to a radio — a figure that has likely grown, thanks to the continued spread of cell phones equipped as FM receptors.<sup>13</sup>

During the last two elections, most of the radio stations banded together to deploy journalists across the country in what was called a "synergie". This allowed the radio stations to work together and doing something no station had the resources to do alone – they had journalists across the country working together to cover the elections. Radio stations jointly then ran one show on polling days.

The four main independent, private radio stations are: Bonesha, Isanganiro, Radio Renaissance and RPA. As mentioned above, all four were destroyed in mid-May together with Rema FM, a station close to the ruling party.

There has been some discussion of reviving the synergie but many of the journalists do not feel comfortable working with Rema due to its proximity to government officials.

The Maison de la Presse has been reopened ostensibly so that journalists can work out of the building, however the prosecutor general has said that Bonesha, Isanganiro, Renaissance and RPA are not allowed in leaving only Rema journalists to produce content. As a result, some journalists are working together to get information out via [SOS Medias Burundi](#).

International broadcasters Voice of America (VOA), Radio France Internationale (RFI) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) are available in the capital. BBC has programming in

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<sup>13</sup> In 2013, 25 per cent of the population (just over 2.5 million people) had mobile phone subscriptions, according to the International Telecommunications Union.

Kirundi (the local language) and VOA has increased its Kirundi-programming though at least one of their journalists has fled to Kigali due to threats.

## 2.2 Television

Because television is too costly for most rural Burundians, it is largely popular only in the main centers. There are currently two television stations: government-controlled Television Nationale du Burundi which broadcasts in Kirundi, Swahili, French and English and TeleRenaissance. This private station, housed with its sister Radio Renaissance, was destroyed on 14 May but has started a YouTube channel<sup>14</sup>.

## 2.3 Print

Due to low literacy rates, newspaper readership is low in Burundi. The state-run daily, *Le Renouveau*, reaches the entire country. *Iwacu* is a private weekly and also has online content in English and French. Other small weeklies include: *Ndongezi*, founded by Catholic Church; *Arc-en-ciel*, a private, French-language weekly; *Ubumwe*, a government-owned weekly and *Agence Burundaise de Presse (ABP)* state news agency.

## 2.4 Online

According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Internet penetration was only 1.3 per cent in 2013.<sup>15</sup> Online publishing remains minimal, mainly due to low literacy rates and poor internet access. There are no government restrictions on internet access or content.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this, and also because it has been the only medium still available, some journalists have turned to the Internet to get news and information to their communities. There have been numerous Facebook and Twitter accounts set up. As mentioned above, *Tele-Renaissance* has set up a YouTube channel while other journalists have banded together to create *SOS Medias Burundi*. They have set up Facebook, Twitter and SoundCloud<sup>17</sup> accounts and are pushing out information through these channels.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJgFqNlr8v0Hhvv-fnygAlw>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/burundi#.VYEi7\\_mqpBc](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/burundi#.VYEi7_mqpBc)

<sup>17</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/sosmediasburundi>

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## 2.5 Media organizations

*Maison de la Presse du Burundi (MPB)* – Its mission is to reinforce capacity of media and professional organizations and to respond to training needs, promote the flow of information and exchanges between journalists and communication professionals and to promote freedom of the press, professional solidarity and pluralism and independence of the media. It essentially serves as a meeting place for media workers in Burundi and also houses some of the media organizations.

*Observatoire de la Presse du Burundi (OPB)* - Was set up in 2004 and is intended to be a self-regulatory body. The body's principal goal is to contribute to upholding the professional code of ethics and conduct in both private and state media. The OPB is to make observations and recommendations regarding journalists and media outlets that deviate from the rules of professional ethics and conduct. The OPB regularly submits a report with its findings and recommended disciplinary sanctions to the ABJ.

*Union burundaise des journalistes (UBJ)* – The former Association burundaise des journalistes (ABJ) became the UBJ in October 2009. UBJ's main objectives are to protect and strengthen the rights and freedoms of journalists in both private and state-run media.

*Association Burundaise des Femmes Journalistes (AFJO)* – Was created by women journalists in Bujumbura in 2003 to promote women's rights through the media. Among its achievements is the production of radio, television programs, and documentaries on critical issues facing women including sexual violence, harmful cultural practices and legal violations. It trains journalists and other activists on media activism and monitors government policies.

*Association Burundaise des Radiodiffuseurs (ABR)* – Was set up in 2003 and bring together both public and private radio. The association's main objective is to contribute to the development of broadcasting in Burundi, and to ensure its members effective representation, including with the Government. In 2008, ABR created the Centres de Ressources Audiovisuelle (CERA) to respond to the technical challenges faced by broadcast media in Burundi. CERA provides technical training and also serves as a central point for purchasing audiovisual supplies.

## 2.6 Media Legislation and Regulation

Burundi's constitution guarantees freedom of speech and of the press, but the country's laws impose criminal penalties on journalists for defamation, discrediting the state, insulting the head of state, and threatening state security.

The 2003 Media Law allows harsh fines and prison terms of up to five years for the dissemination of information that insults the president or is defamatory toward other individuals. In 2012, the government introduced a bill to decriminalize media offenses, but journalists said it would also compel them to reveal their sources in cases deemed to threaten

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state security or public order. Another provision requires journalists to broadcast or publish only “balanced information from sources that have been rigorously verified.” Offenses would not be punishable by imprisonment, but heavy fines are prescribed for certain violations, which could place a serious financial burden on media organizations.”<sup>18</sup>

The law was promulgated in June 2013 and while it decriminalized media offenses under the 2003 Press Law, the new law replaced criminal penalties with crippling fines of between \$2,000 and \$6,000, well beyond the means of most Burundian journalists. According to Freedom House, the new law also “limits the ability of individuals to become journalists and practice journalism, among other restrictive provisions. Journalists also faced increasing harassment and attacks throughout the year.”<sup>19</sup>

Freedom House continued: “In addition, the law was widely criticized for limiting the protection of journalistic sources, and requiring journalists to meet certain educational and professional standards. The law also banned the publication of stories related to national defense, security, public safety, and the economy. Finally, the law gave the National Council for Communication (CNC), a government agency, the power to issue or withdraw press cards in defamation cases.”<sup>20</sup>

As such, the new law has resulted in a deterioration of press freedom and “facilitates arbitrary application of the press and media laws—the government frequently targets journalists for crimes related to vaguely defined state interests. Furthermore, ambiguous legal language is adjudicated by a judiciary that lacks independence and is influenced by the political agenda. In addition, the expanded powers of the CNC (due to the June 2013 amendments to the media law) may encourage capricious administration and removal of press passes due to broadly framed charges of defamation or insult against the government. The CNC is responsible for enforcing media laws; penalties can include the suspension of a media outlet’s activities.”<sup>21</sup>

The law prohibits political parties, labor unions, or foreign nongovernmental organizations from owning media outlets in the country.

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<sup>18</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/burundi#.VYEi7\\_mqpBc](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/burundi#.VYEi7_mqpBc)

<sup>19</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/burundi#.VYEK\\_fmqpBc](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/burundi#.VYEK_fmqpBc)

<sup>20</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/burundi#.VYEK\\_fmqpBc](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/burundi#.VYEK_fmqpBc)

<sup>21</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/burundi#.VYEK\\_fmqpBc](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/burundi#.VYEK_fmqpBc)

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### 3. The media and the current political context

The three most prominent independent radio stations — [RPA](#), [Insanganiro](#), and [Bonesha FM](#) — were created during the civil war, all with explicit goals of peace, reconciliation and education. According to journalist Cora Currier, “that public-service mission persists: It’s a rare conversation with a journalist that doesn’t include the French verb “sensibiliser” — to sensitize, or raise awareness.”<sup>22</sup> All three radio stations, as well as Radio-Télévision Renaissance and Rema FM (a station close to the ruling party) were attacked by unidentified individuals and largely destroyed on May 14. They have not broadcast since.

Panos Grands Lacs director, Cyprien Ndikumana, said that “normally everyone listens to the radio on their mobile phones. Not now. It’s really a catastrophic situation”.<sup>23</sup> The only large radio station remaining is the state broadcaster, RTNB, which according to Panos research had the second largest audience before the current crisis.<sup>24</sup> Some small religious stations are also broadcasting but only RTNB is airing news and information programming. “Those that informed the public are those that were destroyed and they were destroyed precisely because they provided information and conducted investigations,” said Ndikumana.

International broadcasters BBC, VOA and RFI continue to broadcast news and information and in some cases have increased their broadcast time but according to Ndikumana they can’t replace the local radio stations. Since the broadcast sector was liberalized in 2004, Burundians have been accustomed to listening more to Burundian stations and less to international broadcasters, he said. Today, he said “we are information orphans. It’s like our food has been taken away. All that’s left are rumours whether on Facebook or Twitter but the information there is not verified for the most part”.<sup>25</sup>

On June 10, the General Prosecutor’s office announced it was refusing an appeal for private radio and television stations RPA, Isanganiro, Bonesha, Renaissance and Humuriza (based in Gitega and partner with *Iwacu* newspaper) to resume activities. For its part, Amnesty International warned on 10 June that escalating threats against journalists and other media workers in the past week were worrying signs that journalism in Burundi had become increasingly dangerous since an attempted coup last month.”<sup>26</sup>

Although the Prosecutor did authorize the reopening of the radio studio at the Maison de la Presse, yet did not allow certain media organizations including Bonesha, RPA, Radio-Tele

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<sup>22</sup> <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/4/19/snap-crackle-hissthesoundofdemocracyinburundi.html>

<sup>23</sup> Cyprien Ndikumana, personal interview. 17 June 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Ndikumana.

<sup>25</sup> Ndikumana.

<sup>26</sup> <http://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/ocha-eastern-africaflash-update-12-11-june-2015-elections-crisis-burundi-and-regional>

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Renaissance, Isanganiro and Humuriza FM to access the studio. As a result, only Radio Rema staffers are allowed to use the studio.

Those journalists that have remained in Burundi are doing their best to provide information to their communities but can only do so through online media. They have set up a Soundcloud account, [SOS Medias Burundi](#), for example but are very careful when producing audio reports that they do not use their voices for fear they would be recognized. They have also set up a [Twitter account](#) and have over 2,000 followers.

Perhaps even more impressive is the [Iwacu website](#) which has seen more than 100,000 unique visitors a day during the crisis. In addition, the [Agence Infos Grands Lacs](#) continues to produce and broadcast daily audio and video reports on Burundi and by doing so work with substantial risk.

Burundi's journalists "are still trying to do what they can" despite the stations being attacked and burned, according to Innocent Muhozi, the president of the OPB.<sup>27</sup> But he stresses, "we are all in danger and we're all very worried."

Some 50 journalists have fled Burundi with most (42 at last count) ending up in Kigali.

One local journalist has said that when she does venture out in Bujumbura and is seen by political operatives she's asked why she's still in Burundi. She has also received calls from anonymous callers. She says it's much more difficult for women to leave the country as traditionally they are the caregivers and take care of the children. But, she adds, "I have all my documents ready and those of my children. I'm just waiting to see what happens this week [week of June 22]".<sup>28</sup>

Some of those journalists in Rwanda have gotten together with their Rwandan colleagues and have put together a [special broadcast](#) that was broadcast across Rwanda on six different radio stations, some of which reach into Burundi.

International journalists are also being threatened. "On 4 June, Burundian authorities withdrew the accreditation of France 24 journalist Thaïs Brouck, stating that he failed to cover the elections process according to the terms of his accreditation letter. An official also told him that his presence in Burundi was inciting people to demonstrate."<sup>29</sup> According to Innocent Muhozi of the OPB, most of the international journalists have left with only the longstanding local correspondents for VOA, BBC and RFI remaining. He says they have been threatened and some have had their accreditation pulled.

Finally, there have been international lobbying and advocacy efforts early on in the crisis including those by Great Lakes researcher, [Marie-Soleil Frère](#) and [the International Federation of Journalists](#) and more recently by 15 press freedom and human rights organizations.

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<sup>27</sup> Muhozi, personal interview. 17 June 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Burundian journalist. Personal interview, 19 June 2015.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/articles/news/2015/06/burundi-media-clampdown-intensifies-after-coup-attempt/>

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## 4. Challenges facing journalists and the media sector

*"We are nourished by rumours."*

– Burundian journalist

The two biggest challenges currently facing journalists and media workers in Burundi are security and financial survival.

### 4.1 Safety

Even before the current crisis, Burundi's journalists were often intimidated, called in for questioning and [occasionally arrested](#). As of 18 June 2015, some 50 journalists have left the country with the lion's share (42) in Kigali<sup>30</sup>, some with their families. Others are trying to get there but security forces are turning people away at the crossings.

One journalist who fled to Rwanda with his journalist wife and their three young children said his kids are traumatized. Shortly before they fled, a teargas grenade was fired into their home. But he said the journey was dangerous and was taken partly on foot, partly on motorbike, whatever means was available. He said the most dangerous part was getting through checkpoints.

For their part, the Association of Rwandan Journalists (ARJ) said that they thought they'd only have around five journalists come to Kigali and have been overwhelmed with the 40+ Burundian journalists that have arrived. ARJ's President, Collin Haba, says there are several concerns. The first is that of finances – putting them up, feeding them, etc. But the other concern is trying to find a way to keep them busy and occupied. He believes the journalists will go back to Burundi after the elections but it's far too early to know for sure.

Meanwhile in Burundi, despite assurances from police and security forces that there is security, others say there's a palpable sense of fear and a lot of uncertainty. According to one journalist working in Bujumbura: "the terrain is not friendly for journalists....No journalist has a permanent home these days because there's so much fear. So they move from place to place."<sup>31</sup> Another journalist said that the possibility of civil war is very real. As for the elections, he asked: "How can you have dialogue if the media are closed?"<sup>32</sup>

It's not just Burundian journalists who are targeted. As mentioned above, international journalists have also had their accreditation pulled and one Rwandan journalist was arrested in

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<sup>30</sup> The journalists say it's the easiest place to get to and is, literally, just a few hours up the road.

<sup>31</sup> Personal interview. 22 June 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Burundian journalist. Personal interview. 18 June 2015.

northern Burundi while he was covering the plight of refugees crossing into Rwanda. He was held for several days before being released.

## 4.2 Other challenges

Other concerns include basic survival. While most media outlets did pay their staff for the first month of the crisis, they simply do not have the means to continue to pay staff if the media houses are not operational. This has not only immediate implications but can have medium- and long-term effects on Burundi's media sector. Journalists will seek work elsewhere and the sector will suffer from a brain drain precisely when this profession is needed most.

Several journalists have said that they would be keen to work together in a *synergie* but even that is not possible as all the main radio stations have been destroyed.

Those journalists in Kigali (and elsewhere) face a serious risk of becoming frustrated and feeling hopeless as long as they are separated from their families and cannot do their jobs knowing well that news and information is critical at the current time. They have nothing to occupy their time while in Kigali.

Finally, the regional implications of the current crisis cannot be ignored. Not only has Nkurunziza set an example by seeking a third term (with eyes also Rwanda's President Kagame as he finishes his last term and that country gets set for presidential elections in 2017) but the instability in a region that has been wracked by civil and cross-border conflicts for the past several decades cannot be underscored. The region is fragile and while the media in some cases have been complicit in the hate- and fear-mongering, there is also a very important role media can play in building peace and working towards reconciliation but this can only happen if the media are allowed to do their job.

## 5. Recommendations

*"Why did the world mobilize after Charlie Hebdo but not for us?"*

– Journalist in Burundi

The current situation in Burundi is not only extremely difficult, if not impossible, for journalists to operate in but also presents incredible challenges for press freedom and media development organizations. Several media development organizations expressed concern for their partners on the ground and in some cases would not even identify them. In addition, as long as the radio stations remain destroyed and without permission from the authorities to rebuild, it will be nearly impossible to provide any type of assistance. As such, options for international actors may be limited but they do exist.

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**Advocacy** – This was the top request from every single person interviewed for this report. Specifically, they called on international organizations to lobby international bodies such as the EU, AU, EAC as well as the President of Burundi. Some also expressed frustration that the world has no idea what is happening in their country and would never know as long as there are no international correspondents in-country.

**Rebuild and re-equip radio stations** – This can only be done if there is political will and authorization from the authorities. However, donors and implementers should continue lobbying efforts and be ready should a window of opportunity become available.

**Financial support to journalists in Burundi** – Those journalists remaining in Burundi not only fear for their safety and in some cases are forced to move from day to day, but they also no longer have an income and no way to support their families. Donors and implementers should immediately ensure that these journalists have some financial support during the crisis. This is crucial to prevent the likelihood of brain drain which would be devastating to the media sector.

**Financial support to journalists in Rwanda** – Those journalists who have fled to Rwanda (and elsewhere) also require financial support. According to ARJ, the EU has allocated some funds to at least some of these journalists but the majority remain without any support whatsoever.

**Coordination of financial support** – Several journalists said that despite the efforts of ARJ and others, there is no solid coordination of existing financial support. As a result, some journalists are benefitting greatly while others not at all.

**Psycho-social support for those journalists in exile** – Journalists in exile often are left without any support structure having left their families and friends behind. Those journalists currently in Kigali have absolutely nothing to do. One option is to provide peer support and also use group meetings to identify additional activities that might benefit morale.

**Training or other activities for journalists in Kigali** – As mentioned above, those journalists currently in Kigali have nothing to occupy their time. One way to address this and also provide some psycho-social support is to provide some training or other activities for these journalists. Specific activities could be developed in concert with the journalists in exile.

**Radio in exile** – Isango Star, a radio station in Kigali, has worked with several Burundian journalists and produced a one hour programme in Kirundi that was then broadcast on six Rwandan radio stations. Efforts like this should be supported. Another radio station in Kigali, Contact FM, has offered those journalists in exile working space and have suggested that with some equipment they could set up a website where they can post stories about what is going on. This could become a hub for the journalists both in Burundi and abroad. It would include an online radio. Programming could also address the ongoing refugee situation in Rwanda. Estimated cost is EUR 30,000.

**International partner mission (Burundi)** – At a recent meeting in Kigali with journalists from Burundi and several Rwandan associations, a request was made to have a delegation at an

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international level to travel to Burundi and urge the government to allow the journalists to return home and operate freely.

**International partner mission (regional)** – The politics and histories of Burundi, Rwanda and DRC are inextricably entwined and all three have upcoming presidential elections (Burundi July 15, DRC 2016 and Rwanda 2017) and all three have press freedom issues. To avoid a repeat of Burundi, it could be helpful to pursue an international partner mission of press freedom organizations to all three countries.

**Safety hotline** – This should be set up immediately and should provide journalists still in Burundi with a way to report threats, intimidations and such.

**Protective safety gear** – There was no consensus on this issue with some journalists saying helmets and body armour could be useful while others saying it would simply draw attention to journalists and make them even more of a target. At this point, would not recommend providing such gear, however, the situation should be monitored.

## 6. Annexes

### 6.1 Persons Interviewed

- Johan Deflander, Head of Mission, Radio La Benevolencija, Burundi
- Collin Haba, President, Rwanda Journalists' Association
- Innocent Muhozi, President, OPB and Director, Radio-Tele Renaissance
- Cyprien Ndikumana, Director, PGL
- Bob Rugurika, President, Radio Publique Africaine
- Carine Debrabandere, Regional Coordinator for Central Africa, DW Akademie

In addition, numerous journalists in Burundi were interviewed for this report but wish to remain anonymous due to ongoing security concerns.

### 6.2 Local, regional and international media development organizations in Burundi

While Burundi has rarely garnered the headlines or the donor support that other post-conflict countries have, there are still several media support organizations have been working in the country for some time now.

**Panos Grands Lacs (PGL)** is implementing a regional election program, IGL3, in the three Great Lakes countries of Burundi, Rwanda and DRC given that all three are to hold elections during 2015 – 2017. All activities in Burundi are currently suspended.<sup>33</sup> The project had been partnering with the radio stations and they were supposed to train journalists on election coverage such as debates. They are very worried about the situation.

PGL and other actors on the ground have held meetings with the Conseil National de la Communication (CNC) and the Ministry of Telecommunications, Information and communication in an effort to have them allow the radios back on the air. PGL also created an online news agency, [Infos Grands Lacs](#).

**Search for Common Ground (SFCG)** has been working in Burundi since 1995. SFCG has supported the process of peace and reconciliation in Burundi, building the capacity of local stakeholders to address a wide range of conflict issues, including transitional justice, refugee reintegration, land conflict, sexual and gender-based violence, and youth manipulation. One of our most important resources is Studio Ijambo, which has transformed Burundi's media landscape by training journalists and producing informative, solution-oriented programs.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> <http://panosgl.org/projets/projet-infos-grands-lacs-igl3>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.sfcg.org/burundi/>

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**Free Press Unlimited (FPU)** has been working with local radio stations and youth journalists across the whole country since 2011. One of their activities is producing a popular youth programme. At the moment, their partner's safety is their greatest worry. Journalists, activists and others who speak out are at great risk. With other international organizations and local journalists FPU is exploring the possibilities of making the radio stations or alternatives operational as quickly as possible, and of finding other ways to provide people with information.<sup>35</sup>

**Deutsche Welle Akademie** has been working in Burundi since 2008. Their work has been postponed due to the current situation on the ground. Details of their work are being withheld due to safety concerns.

**La Benevolencija** has a large media support project that works with six private independent media: RPA, Bonesha, Iwacu, Isanganiro, Rema and Renaissance. They have provided technical support and assistance, reorganising and harmonising the organisational structure and work on the editorial policy of the newsrooms. They also do quite a lot of co-production work with several media (private and public) on transitional justice, history, dealing with the past, and the origins of group violence. They do radio, print as well as TV productions. On radio, we produce a national radio drama, sketches and factual programs as well.

Most of this work has been seriously affected by the events since 26 April. Most of the events have been scaled down due to the political situation. They are also actively involved in ongoing discussions with both media and with the UN and the different international community members still present in Burundi.

**Voice of America (VOA)** does not have media support programs in Burundi, however, they are broadcasting and have increased the amount of broadcast time since the crisis began. Until the crisis, VOA broadcast twice daily news programs in Kirundi. They now have an additional 4.5 hours daily including a one hour call-in show that has become quite popular. They are in the process of hiring additional stringers to cover the provinces and have also added two more reporters/producers in Washington. They have also set up a local phone line to which people can send their texts. These messages are then transmitted to Washington and producers will call them from there.

**Radio Netherlands (RNW)** – has been working in Burundi for several years. One of their success stories has been the Yaga Blog<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/news/burundi-elections-without-information-0>

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/05/14/au-burundi-la-tentative-de-coup-d-etat-en-direct-avec-les-blogueurs-de-yaga-burundi\\_4633538\\_3212.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/05/14/au-burundi-la-tentative-de-coup-d-etat-en-direct-avec-les-blogueurs-de-yaga-burundi_4633538_3212.html)

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Cover photo: A radio station in Burundi. Photo: Jacky Delorme (Panos Europe)