

Rwanda | 30.04.2009

Government urged to lift ban on BBC's local broadcasts

Reporters Without Borders has written to Rwandan information minister Louise Mushikiwabo expressing deep concern about the "temporary suspension" of BBC broadcasts in the local language Kinyarwanda because of comments about the 1994 genocide which Rwandan citizens made in one of these broadcasts.

"We are aware that the genocide continues to be a highly sensitive subject in your country and that Rwanda is engaged in a delicate process of national reconciliation, but we nonetheless think that this suspension is arbitrary and constitutes a serious press freedom violation," Reporters Without Borders said in its 28 April letter.

"We therefore ask you to restore the BBC broadcasts without delay and to guarantee respect for diversity of views," the letter said. "In a country where there is no press freedom, this incident seems to be an additional way of reducing Rwandans' access to news and information."

The temporary ban on the BBC's programmes in Kinyarwanda was announced on 26 April, a day after the programme "Imvo n'Imvano" (Heart of the Problem) included an interview in which former Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu said that as a Hutu, he could "never give in to Tutsi demands to apologize for the 1994 genocide." Another interviewee said the bodies of Rwandans that washed up on the banks of Lake Victoria during the genocide were those of Hutus killed by the rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front.

The government said these comments were liable to undermine efforts at national unity and reconciliation and were clearly made with the sole aim of "inciting hatred among Rwandans."

Relations between the government and foreign media are tense. Sonia Rolley, the correspondent of the French public radio station Radio France Internationale (RFI), was expelled without explanation in June 2006. Five months later, the government ordered the closure of RFI's local FM relay station after breaking off diplomatic relations with France.

Reporters Without Borders is ranked 145th out of 173 countries in the 2008 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index while President Paul Kagame has for several years been on the Reporters Without Borders list of "Predators of Press Freedom."