

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2011		64	Rwanda	<i>Agnes Uwimana, Saidati Mukakibibi</i>

*Announcement*

Today, International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee has launched a campaign for Agnes Uwimana and Saidati Mukakibibi, two Rwandan journalists sentenced under a "genocide ideology" law, among others, to extremely lengthy prison sentences for expressing their critical views on contemporary Rwandese politics, including interpretations of the 1994 genocide. The law, internationally acknowledged to be vaguely worded, stifles free expression about crucial historical events such as the 1994 genocide. Last month the government pledged to revise it. Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders and the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers also protested against the sentences. In countries as diverse as France, Russia and Rwanda, laws are used to prescribe interpretations of historical events; they often have a chilling effect on free expression about the past. We hope that you can send the recommended urgent appeal immediately. Please remember to write in your professional capacity.

P.S. See also:

1) *For similar cases:*

Network of Concerned Historians, *Annual Report 2010*

[[http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content\\_files/file/AR/10.pdf](http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/AR/10.pdf)]

Network of Concerned Historians, *Annual Report 2009*

[[http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content\\_files/file/AR/09.pdf](http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/AR/09.pdf)]

2) *For discussion of the Rwandese law:*

Amnesty International, *Safer To Stay Silent: The Chilling Effect of Rwanda's Laws on "Genocide Ideology" and "Sectarianism"* (2010)

English: [http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content\\_files/file/TO/236.pdf](http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/TO/236.pdf)

French: [http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content\\_files/file/TO/237.pdf](http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/TO/237.pdf)

Article 19, *Comment on the Law Relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology of Rwanda* (2009), [http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content\\_files/file/TO/238.pdf](http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/TO/238.pdf)



<http://www.internationalpen.org.uk/go/news/rwanda-long-prison-sentences-for-two-journalists>

## **RWANDA: Long prison sentences for two journalists**

**14 February 2011—RAN 06/11**

The Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) of PEN International protests the 4 February 2011 conviction and imprisonment of *Umurabyo* editor Agnes Uwimana and reporter Saidati Mukakibibi for articles criticizing President Paul Kagame ahead of the 2010 elections. The journalists were sentenced respectively to 17 and 7 years in prison on charges of “threatening state security, genocide ideology, divisionism and defamation”. The WiPC condemns such use of vaguely worded legislation on “genocide ideology” and “divisionism” to silence criticism of the government. It calls on the Rwandan authorities to release Uwimana and Mukakibibi and to fulfil its promises to review the relevant laws.

On 4 February 2011 Uwimana was sentenced to 17 years in prison for “threatening state security, genocide ideology, divisionism and defamation”, while Mukakibibi received a 7-year jail term for “threatening state security”. Both journalists, who had been detained since July 2010, were taken to Kigali’s central prison following sentencing. They intended to appeal the verdict before the Supreme Court.

The prosecution stemmed from a series of articles they had written ahead of the August 2010 presidential elections in which they criticized government policies and officials, including President Paul Kagame, and challenged the official version of Rwanda’s 1994 genocide. One of the articles that the judge referred to stated that some Rwandans were unhappy with the country’s rulers which the prosecutors said was “meant to stir [up] hatred and fury against the government”. In January 2011, prosecutors requested a 33-year sentence for Uwimana and 12 years for Mukakibibi.

According to Amnesty International (AI), Uwimana acknowledged that some of her articles may have lacked professionalism. However AI also said that the government had failed to adequately demonstrate how the articles could be interpreted as a threat to national security or were intended or were likely to incite violence.

Rwanda’s laws on “genocide ideology” and “sectarianism”, introduced after the 1994 genocide to restrict speech that could promote hatred, are widely acknowledged to be vaguely worded. The government promised in 2010 to review the “genocide ideology” law and the draft law is reportedly due to be discussed by the cabinet in late February 2011. The law not only prohibits hate speech but also criminalizes legitimate criticism of the government.

**Background:**

Uwimana was arrested on 8 July 2010 and Mukakibibi the following week. The authorities denied that their arrest was linked to forthcoming elections in August. *Umurabyo* had in its recent editions raised questions about a number of sensitive topics, including the murder of journalist Jean-Léonard Rugambage who was shot dead outside his home on 24 June 2010, the fallout between Kagame and two now-exiled military leaders, as well as reports alleging extravagant government spending on luxury aeroplanes.

In June 2010, the chairman of Rwanda's Media High Council Board accused Uwimana of publishing "defamatory articles and falsehoods" in an article that suggested that all Rwandans were both victims and perpetrators of the 1994 genocide. In 2007–2008, Uwimana served a one-year prison sentence on charges of ethnic divisionism and libel after she published an opinion piece on ethnic violence in Rwanda.

**Useful links:**

\*\*Report by Amnesty International (5 February 2011): <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/rwandan-journalists%E2%80%99-imprisonment-condemned-2011-02-05>

\*\*Report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (4 February 2011): <http://cpj.org/2011/02/in-rwanda-journalists-given-17-and-12-years-in-pri.php>

\*\*Report by the BBC (4 February 2011): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12370738>

**Please send appeals:**

\*\*Protesting the extremely lengthy prison sentences given to Umurabyo editor Agnes Uwimana and reporter Saidati Mukakibibi for articles criticizing the Rwandan government;

\*\*Urging the Rwandan authorities to release Uwimana and Mukakibibi and pursue any press-related case against them and other journalists in the civil rather than the criminal courts;

\*\*Calling on the government to review the country's vaguely worded laws on "genocide ideology" and "sectarianism"

**Send appeals to:**

*President*

\*\*Paul Kagame

\*\*Office of the President

\*\*BP 15

\*\*Urugwiro Village

\*\*Kigali

\*\*Rwanda

\*\*Fax: +250 252 572 431

\*\**Salutation:* Dear President Kagame

*Prosecutor General*

\*\*Martin Ngoga

\*\*National Public Prosecution Authority

\*\*BP 1328

\*\*Kigali

\*\*Rwanda

\*\*Fax: +250 252 589 501

\*\*Email: [info@nppa.gov.rw](mailto:info@nppa.gov.rw)

\*\**Salutation:* Dear Prosecutor General

For further details please contact Tamsin Mitchell at the Writers in Prison Committee London Office:  
PEN International, Brownlow House, 50-51 High Holborn, London WC1V 6ER Tel: +44 (0) 207 405  
0338 Fax +44 (0) 207 405 0339 email: [tamsin.mitchell@pen-international.org](mailto:tamsin.mitchell@pen-international.org)