



**Submission to the Fourth Cycle of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of
Rwanda**
For Consideration at the 51st Session of the UPR Working Group
Submitted on July 17, 2025 by:

Committee to Protect Journalists¹ (CPJ), an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide. We defend the right of journalists to report the news without fear of reprisal.

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¹ Committee to Protect Journalists, "About," accessed August 20, 2025, <https://cpj.org/about/>.

Executive Summary

1. As an organization promoting freedom of expression and the rule of law, CPJ has focused this submission on Rwanda's compliance with international human rights obligations related to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the press and assesses progress made since the last review in 2021.
2. This submission draws mainly on CPJ research on imprisoned journalists in Rwanda. Over the past five years, Rwandan authorities have detained several journalists, most of whom use YouTube as their platform ("YouTubers"), on vague charges or by using legal provisions that fall short of international human rights and regional standards for freedom of expression. Their cases have been characterized by irregularities, including prolonged pre-charge and pre-trial detention.²
3. This submission will also detail Rwanda's failure to credibly investigate alleged attacks and torture of journalists behind bars and the 2023 death of an investigative journalist, John Williams Ntwali.
4. These violations, CPJ submits, are symptomatic of a broader repressive environment for the press. This includes the legal environment: Rwanda has several laws that criminalize free speech and undermine press freedom, including the 2018 Law on Prevention and Punishment of Cybercrimes,³ which provides prison time for "publication of rumours", and the 2018 Law Determining Penalties and Offenses in General (the penal code), which criminalizes the spread of certain "false information."⁴
5. CPJ recommends that Rwandan authorities discontinue criminal proceedings against journalists, release those detained for their work, provide for a credible and independent investigation into Ntwali's death and allegations that journalists have been mistreated and tortured behind bars, and undertake reform of laws used to restrict the work of the press.

Human Rights Instruments Referred to in this Submission

² See *Committee to Protect Journalists, Rwanda*, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://cpj.org/africa/rwanda/>. CPJ documents cases of censorship, attacks, and restrictions against journalists in Rwanda.

³ Republic of Rwanda, *Law No. 60/2018 of 22 August 2018 on Prevention and Punishment of Cybercrimes*, *Official Gazette* (Special), 25 September 2018, Article 39, accessed August 22, 2025, https://www.govca.rw/download/Law_on_prevention_and_punishment_of_cyber_crimes.pdf. This article criminalizes the "publication of rumours" via computer systems, carrying potential penalties of imprisonment and fines.

⁴ Republic of Rwanda, *Law No. 68/2018 of 30 August 2018 Determining Offenses and Penalties in General (Penal Code)*, *Official Gazette* (Special), 27 September 2018, accessed August 26, 2025, <https://rwandalii.org/akn/rw/act/law/2018/68/eng@2018-09-27>

6. Rwanda is a party⁵ to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights⁶ and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,⁷ which require states to respect freedom of expression and the right of individuals to seek, receive, and impart information.
7. Article 38 of Rwanda's constitution⁸ states: "Freedom of press, expression, and access to information are recognised and guaranteed by the State". However, the constitution also provides restrictions, saying that these freedoms "shall not prejudice public order, good morals, the protection of youth and children, the right of every citizen to honour and dignity, and protection of personal and family privacy."

Implementation of recommendations from the previous UPR

8. At least 27 of the recommendations Rwanda received following the Third Cycle UPR⁹ (January 2021-37th session) are addressed by the research summarized in this submission. These recommendations were aimed at safeguarding freedom of expression, ensuring fair trials and improving conditions behind bars. Rwanda supported 17 of them but CPJ finds that there has been inadequate or partial progress in the implementation of all the assessed recommendations. A more detailed account can be found in Annex A of this submission.

Criminalization of Speech

9. The 2018 Law on Prevention and Punishment of Cybercrimes¹⁰ stipulates prison time for the publication of "rumours that may incite fear, insurrection, or violence amongst the population or

⁵ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, "State Parties to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights," accessed August 22, 2025, <https://achpr.au.int/en/states>; United Nations Treaty Collection, "Rwanda: Ratification of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights — Ratification Date: July 22, 1983; Date of Entry into Force: October 21, 1986

⁶ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://achpr.au.int/en/charter/african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights>

⁷ United Nations, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Article 19, adopted December 16, 1966, United Nations Treaty Collection, accessed August 22, 2025,

https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?chapter=4&clang=_en&mtdsg_no=iv-4&src=ind

⁸ Republic of Rwanda, *Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda*, 2003 (as amended), Article 38, accessed August 22, 2025,

<https://www.minecofin.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=85852&token=bbf2750a8f262658fba1c14f006285a36818abdc>. Article 38 guarantees freedom of the press, expression, and access to information, subject to restrictions related to public order, morals, protection of youth and children, individual honour and dignity, and privacy

⁹ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Universal Periodic Review: Rwanda*, Third Cycle (37th session, January 2021), accessed August 21, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/rw-index>. This source summarizes Rwanda's responses to at least 27 recommendations aimed at safeguarding freedom of expression, ensuring fair trials, and improving prison conditions, noting partial or inadequate implementation.

¹⁰ Republic of Rwanda, *Law No. 60/2018 of 22 August 2018 on Prevention and Punishment of Cybercrimes*, *Official Gazette* (Special), 25 September 2018, Article 39, accessed August 26, 2025, https://www.govca.rw/download/Law_on_prevention_and_punishment_of_cyber_crimes.pdf. This article criminalizes the publication of "rumours that may incite fear, insurrection, or violence amongst the population or that may make a person lose their credibility," effectively criminalizing defamation.

that may make a person lose their credibility.” Using criminal law to address speech that may harm reputations amounts to the criminalization of defamation. The penal code¹¹ also criminalizes the spread of “false information” meant to create “hostile international opinion” of the Rwandan government, speech that may “divide people or may set them against each other” or cause them to “reject the government.”

10. This submission will demonstrate that these provisions, which fall short of African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights recommendations¹² to repeal¹³ defamation and false news laws, have been weaponized to imprison journalists.

Detention of Journalists

11. Rwanda was featured in CPJ’s annual Prison Census¹⁴ every year during the period under review. The Census is a snapshot of journalists behind bars on December 1 each year, and between 2020 and 2024, Rwanda¹⁵ ranked among the worst jailers of journalists in Africa. Most of those journalists behind bars were YouTubers, arrested for critical commentary and reporting on local politics.
12. Three journalists with the YouTube-based outlet *Iwacu TV* were acquitted and released¹⁶ on October 5, 2022, after four years behind bars. The journalists—Damascene Mutuyimana¹⁷,

¹¹ Republic of Rwanda, *Law No. 68/2018 of 30 August 2018 Determining Offenses and Penalties in General (Penal Code)*, *Official Gazette* (Special), 27 September 2018, accessed August 21, 2025, <https://rwandalii.org/akn/rw/act/law/2018/68/eng@2018-09-27>. The Penal Code criminalizes the spread of “false information” intended to create “hostile international opinion” of the government, speech that may “divide people or may set them against each other,” or cause them to “reject the government.

¹² African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, “Resolution 169: Repealing Criminal Defamation Laws in Africa,” adopted at the 47th Ordinary Session, accessed August 21, 2025, <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/169-resolution-repealing-criminal-defamation-laws-africa-achpr-res169xlvii>. This resolution recommends repealing defamation and false news laws, which have been used to criminalize journalism in some African states.

¹³ African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, “Resolution on the Repeal of Criminal Defamation Laws in Africa,” accessed August 22, 2025, <https://achpr.au.int/en/node/902>. This resolution highlights that defamation and false news laws fall short of human rights standards and have been used to imprison journalists.

¹⁴ Committee to Protect Journalists, “In a Record Year, China, Israel, and Myanmar Are the World’s Leading Jailers of Journalists,” accessed August 22, 2025, <https://cpj.org/special-reports/in-record-year-china-israel-and-myanmar-are-worlds-leading-jailers-of-journalists/>. Rwanda was included in CPJ’s annual Prison Census every year during the period under review.

¹⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists, *Imprisoned Journalists: Rwanda, 2024*, accessed August 22, 2025, https://cpj.org/data/imprisoned/2024/?status=Imprisoned&cc_fips%5B%5D=RW&start_year=2024&end_year=2024&group_by=location. The Census provides a snapshot of journalists behind bars on December 1 each year; between 2020 and 2024, Rwanda ranked among the worst jailers of journalists in Africa, with most imprisoned journalists being YouTubers arrested for critical commentary on local politics.

¹⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Rwandan Court Acquits, Releases 3 Iwacu TV Journalists,” October 5, 2022, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://cpj.org/2022/10/rwandan-court-acquits-releases-3-iwacu-tv-journalists/>. Three journalists with the YouTube-based outlet Iwacu TV were acquitted and released after four years in prison.

¹⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists, *Damascene Mutuyimana*, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://cpj.org/data/people/damascene-mutuyimana/>. Damascene Mutuyimana, a journalist for Iwacu TV,

Shadrack Niyonsenga¹⁸, and Jean Baptiste Nshimiyimana¹⁹—had been charged with spreading false information with the intention of creating a hostile international opinion of Rwanda, publishing unoriginal statements and pictures, and inciting insurrection. They were held in pre-trial detention for three years.

13. Although the Iwacu TV YouTubers were prosecuted²⁰ under Rwanda's now-repealed 2012 penal code²¹, the country's current penal code²² still contains provisions similar to those used against them, in particular Article 204, which stipulates prison time for the broadly defined crimes of “causing uprising or unrest among the population,” and Article 194, which criminalizes “spreading false information or harmful propaganda” to create “hostile international opinion against” or to “cause public disaffection” against the government.
14. Phocas Ndayizera²³, a freelancer who contributed to the BBC, was arrested in November 2018 and remained detained at the time of writing, serving a 10-year prison sentence following his 2021 conviction on terrorism charges. Authorities accused Ndayizera of planning terrorist attacks against public infrastructure. During a bail hearing in 2018, Ndayizera pleaded guilty²⁴, but the journalist and his co-defendants changed their pleas to not guilty²⁵ during their trial²⁶ in 2020.

was arrested in October 2018 on charges including spreading false information and inciting insurrection. He was acquitted and released on October 5, 2022, after four years in detention.

¹⁸ Committee to Protect Journalists, *Shadrack Niyonsenga*, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://cpj.org/data/people/shadrack-niyonsenga/>. Shadrack Niyonsenga, a journalist for Iwacu TV, was arrested in October 2018 on charges including spreading false information and inciting insurrection. He was acquitted and released on October 5, 2022, after four years in detention.

¹⁹ Committee to Protect Journalists, *Jean Baptiste Nshimiyimana*, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://cpj.org/data/people/jean-baptiste-nshimiyimana/>. Jean Baptiste Nshimiyimana, a journalist for Iwacu TV, was arrested in October 2018 on charges including spreading false information and inciting insurrection. He was acquitted and released on October 5, 2022, after four years in detention.

²⁰ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Rwandan Prosecutors Request 22-Year Prison Sentences for 3 Iwacu TV Journalists,” September 6, 2022, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://cpj.org/2022/09/rwandan-prosecutors-request-22-year-prison-sentences-for-3-iwacu-tv-journalists/#~:text=In%20preliminary%20hearings.came%20into%20force>

²¹ Republic of Rwanda, *Organic Law No. 01/2012/OL of 02/05/2012 Instituting the Penal Code*, Official Gazette No. Special of 14 June 2012, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://policehumanrightsresources.org/content/uploads/2016/07/Organic-Law-Instituting-the-Penal-Code-Rwanda-2012.pdf?x19059>

²² Republic of Rwanda, *Law No. 68/2018 of 30/08/2018 Determining Offences and Penalties in General*, Official Gazette No. Special of 27 September 2018, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://rwandalii.org/akn/rw/act/law/2018/68/eng@2018-09-27>

²³ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Phocas Ndayizera,” accessed August 22, 2025, <https://cpj.org/data/people/phocas-ndayizera/>. Phocas Ndayizera, a freelance journalist contributing to the BBC's Kinyarwanda and Kirundi services, was arrested on November 21, 2018, in Kigali. He was later convicted in 2021 on charges of planning terrorist attacks and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

²⁴ BBC Gahuza, “Rwanda: Urubanza rw’umunyamakuru Phocas Ndayizera rwasubitswe kubera ikoranabuhanga,” *BBC Gahuza*, 18 September 2019, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/gahuza/49739843>

²⁵ Chronicles Rwanda, “Not Guilty: All Suspects in Terrorism Case Against BBC Journalist Change Plea,” *Chronicles Rwanda*, February 5, 2020, accessed August 21, 2025, <https://www.chronicles.rw/2020/02/05/not-guilty-all-suspects-in-terrorism-case-against-bbc-journalist-change-plea/>

²⁶ BBC News Gahuza, “Urubanza rw’umunyamakuru Phocas Ndayizera rwatangiye,” *BBC News Gahuza*, January 7, 2020, accessed August 21, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/gahuza/amakuru-51023163>

The individuals claimed that they had signed earlier confessions while being tortured.

Authorities told CPJ that the courts had dismissed these allegations.

15. Ndayizera was accused of conspiring with several others, including former journalist Cassien Ntamuhanganga²⁷, who was tried in absentia. Ntamuhanganga escaped prison²⁸ in Rwanda in 2017 while serving a 25-year sentence²⁹ for conspiracy to murder and conspiracy against the president. On May 23, 2021, Ntamuhanganga, who sought asylum³⁰ in Mozambique after his 2017 escape, was forcibly disappeared³¹ after being detained³² by men believed to be Mozambican police and a man who is said to have spoken Kinyarwanda.
16. On April 15, 2020, officers from the Rwanda Investigation Bureau arrested Dieudonné Niyonsenga³³, owner of the YouTube-based Ishema TV, who is also known as Cyuma Hassan, alongside Fidèle Komezusenge, a driver with the same outlet, for allegedly breaching COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Prosecutors charged Niyonsenga and Komezusenge with forgery of press cards, citing Ishema TV company identification cards they had with them at the time of arrest; impersonating journalists, citing lack of accreditation by the regulatory Rwanda Media Commission; and hindering the implementation of government-ordered work. They were both acquitted and released in March 2021, and Niyonsenga continued to publish critical reporting and commentary on Ishema TV.
17. Prosecutors appealed Niyonsenga's acquittal, and in November 2021, the Kigali High Court convicted³⁴ him of humiliating authorities, forgery, and impersonating a journalist. The offense of humiliating authorities did not exist in Rwanda's laws at the time of Niyonsenga's conviction, as it

²⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), "Legacy of Rwanda Genocide Includes Media Restrictions, Self-Censorship," CPJ, December 8, 2014, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://cpj.org/reports/2014/12/legacy-of-rwanda-genocide-includes-media-restrictions/#:~:text=One%20of%20those%20who,led%20to%20his%20arrest>

²⁸ News24, "Rwandan Journalist Escapes from Prison, Authorities Say," News24, November 1, 2017, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://www.news24.com/News24/rwandan-journalist-escapes-from-prison-authorities-say-20171101>

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2016: Rwanda," *Human Rights Watch*, January 27, 2016, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/rwanda>

³⁰ DW, "Receios que 'o pior tenha acontecido' ao jornalista ruandês," DW, 29 de junho de 2021, acessado em 18 de agosto de 2025, <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/receios-de-que-o-pior-tenha-acontecido-ao-jornalista-ruand%C3%AAs-desaparecido/a-58095844>

³¹ Human Rights Watch, "Mozambique: Grave Concerns for Rwandan Asylum Seeker," *Human Rights Watch*, June 15, 2021, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/15/mozambique-grave-concerns-rwandan-asylum-seeker>

³² Centro para Democracia e Direitos Humanos (CDD), "Théogène Turatsinze (2012) and Ntamuhanganga Cassien (2021): The Most High-Profile Victims of Paul Kagame's Regime in Mozambique," *CDD Mozambique*, June 2021, accessed August 21, 2025, https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Theogene-Turatsinze-2012-and-Ntamuhanganga-Cassien-2021_the-most-high-profile-victims-of-Paul-Kagame's-regime-in-Mozambique.pdf

³³ Committee to Protect Journalists, "Dieudonné Niyonsenga," CPJ, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://cpj.org/data/people/dieudonne-niyonsenga/>

³⁴ "Rwanda: Urukiko Rukuru Rwakatiye Umunyamakuru Niyonsenga Dieudonne Imyaka 7," *Ijwi ry'Amerika*, November 11, 2021, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://www.radiyoyacuova.com/a/rwanda-urukiko-rukuru-rwakatiye-umunyamakuru-niyonsenga-dieudonne-imyaka-7-6309379.html>

had been repealed³⁵ in 2019. He was sentenced to seven years in prison and fined 5 million Rwandan francs. The courts have since overturned his conviction on the charge of humiliating authorities, but they rejected his attempt to have his case reviewed. In January 2024, Niyonsenga alleged³⁶ he had been tortured behind bars, telling a Kigali court that he was held under “inhumane” conditions in a “hole” and was frequently beaten.

18. On May 31, 2021, Rwandan authorities arrested Aimable Karasira Uzaramba³⁷, a political commentator and founder of the YouTube channel Ukuri Mbona, on charges including genocide denial, justification of genocide, inciting division, and illicit enrichment. Prosecutors later added a money laundering charge. Karasira had publicly criticized the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front and disputed official genocide narratives. He has alleged torture, medical neglect, and interference with his access to legal counsel while in detention. His defense has previously said that he suffers from mental illness and is unfit for trial. His trial began³⁸ in late 2023 and concluded on July 10, 2025, with prosecutors requesting³⁹ a 30-year prison sentence. The courts had yet to issue their judgment at the time of writing.
19. Théoneste Nsengimana, owner of the YouTube channel Umubavu TV Online, was arrested⁴⁰ on October 13, 2021, after promoting an opposition event to commemorate political prisoners. Authorities charged him with criminal association, which carries up to 10 years in prison under the penal code⁴¹, and spreading rumors, which carries up to five years in prison and a fine of up to 3 million Rwandan francs under Rwanda’s cybercrimes law⁴². His co-defendants are members

³⁵ The New Times, “Journalists Laud Supreme Court Landmark Ruling on Defamation,” *The New Times*, April 24, 2019, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/166030/News/journalists-laud-supreme-court-landmark-ruling-on-defamation>

³⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists. “Rwandan Journalist Dieudonné Niyonsenga Says He Was Beaten, Detained in ‘Hole.’” *Committee to Protect Journalists*, January 31, 2024. <https://cpj.org/2024/01/rwandan-journalist-dieudonne-nyonsenga-says-he-was-beaten-detained-in-hole/>. *Committee to Protect Journalists*+3

³⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Aimable Karasira Uzaramba,” accessed August 19, 2025, <https://cpj.org/data/people/aimable-karasira-uzaramba/>

³⁸ Chronicles Rwanda (@ChroniclesRW), “Aimable Karasira Uzaramba, a controversial figure known for his denial of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, has been arrested and is facing multiple charges, including genocide denial and inciting divisions,” X, May 13, 2023, accessed August 19, 2025, <https://x.com/ChroniclesRW/status/1658093134130102272>

³⁹ Yves Bucyana, “Ndasaba ikigongwe’ – Aimable Karasira mu isozwa ry’urubanza rwe,” *BBC Gahuza*, July 10, 2025, accessed August 26, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/gahuza/articles/cjel1qqjp1ko>

⁴⁰ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Théoneste Nsengimana,” CPJ, accessed August 19, 2025, <https://cpj.org/data/people/theoneste-nsengimana/>. Nsengimana, an internet reporter and publisher of Umubavu TV Online, was arrested in Kigali, Rwanda, on October 13, 2021, for posting a video promoting a political event organized by the unregistered DALFA-Umurinzi party. His charges included joining a criminal association and spreading rumors, and his trial began in October 2024. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found his detention to be arbitrary and called for his immediate release.

⁴¹ Rwanda Government Gazette, Special Edition No. 68/2018, September 27, 2018, accessed August 19, 2025, <https://rwandalii.africanlii.org/sites/default/files/gazette/OG%2Bno%2BSpecial%2Bof%2B27-09-2018.pdf>. This gazette includes Law No. 68/2018, which outlines general offences and penalties in Rwanda.

⁴² Ministry of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation, *National Cyber Security Policy*, 2015, accessed August 18, 2025,

of DALFA-Umurinzi, an opposition group that organized the commemoration event, and their trial began in October 2024, after three years of pre-trial detention.

20. In a March 2024 opinion⁴³, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that Nsengimana and his co-defendants were detained arbitrarily, as their arrests resulted from the “peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of opinion and expression and assembly,” and called on the Rwandan government to release them immediately and to accord them enforceable rights to compensation. Nsengimana remains detained at the time of writing.
21. On June 13, 2025, the Nyarugenge Intermediate Court in Kigali sentenced⁴⁴ YouTube commentator Jean Bosco Sengabo⁴⁵, known as Fatakumavuta, to two years and six months⁴⁶ in prison and fined him 1.3 million Rwandan francs (US\$ 970). His conviction stemmed from non-speech-related charges, drug use, and blackmail, but he was also convicted of spreading rumours about local celebrities in contravention of the cybercrimes law. The Rwanda Investigation Bureau had arrested Sengabo in October 2024.

Case of John Williams Ntwali

<https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=70&token=8a1cd43626bfcc2b99fba277aca01e6f2aa1788>

⁴³ United Nations Human Rights Council, “Opinion No. 25/2024 concerning Rwanda,” A/HRC/WGAD/25/2024, May 15, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session99/a-hrc-wgad-2-5-2024-rwanda-aev.pdf> (accessed August 18, 2025). This opinion concerns the arbitrary detention of Rwandan journalist Théoneste Nsengimana, publisher of Umubavu TV Online, arrested on October 13, 2021, for his exercise of freedom of expression and assembly, and calls for his immediate release and compensation.

⁴⁴ IGIHE, “Fatakumavuta sentenced by the Nyarugenge Court,” June 13, 2025, accessed August 22, 2025, https://fr.igihe.com/spip.php?page=mv2_article&id_article=37961. *This article reports that the Nyarugenge Intermediate Court sentenced Sengabo Jean Bosco, alias Fatakumavuta, to two and a half years in prison and a fine of 1,300,000 Rwandan francs for defamation, spreading false information, and drug abuse. Charges of discrimination and public insult were dismissed, and he was granted credit for time served since his arrest in October 2024.*

⁴⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Jean-Bosco Sengabo,” CPJ, accessed August 19, 2025, <https://cpj.org/data/people/jean-bosco-sengabo/>. The profile records that Jean-Bosco Sengabo (also known as Fatakumavuta) is a Rwandan journalist arrested on October 18, 2024, and later sentenced in June 2025 by the Nyarugenge Intermediate Court to two and a half years in prison and a fine of 1,300,000 Rwandan francs for defamation, false information, and drug-related offenses.

⁴⁶ Aurore Teta Ufitiwabo, “Court Slaps Vlogger Fatakumavuta with Two-Year Jail Sentence, Rwf 1.3 m Fine,” *The New Times* (Rwanda), June 13, 2025, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/27210/news/court-slaps-vlogger-fatakumavuta-with-two-year-jail-sentence-rwf13m-fine>. The Nyarugenge Intermediate Court sentenced vlogger Jean Bosco Sengabo—known as Fatakumavuta—to two years and six months in prison and a 1.3 million Rwandan francs fine. The sentence followed charges including defamation, spreading false information, and drug-related offenses, reflecting the court’s application of legal limits on speech and public commentary.

22. Rwandan police said that the investigative journalist John Williams Ntwali⁴⁷ died in a traffic accident in the capital Kigali on January 18, 2023. Ntwali, editor of the privately owned *The Chronicles* newspaper and founder of the YouTube-based Pax TV-Ireme News, reported critically on governance and human rights in Rwanda and frequently faced threats in connection to this journalistic work. Ntwali had reported⁴⁸ previously surviving “staged accidents”.
23. On February 7, 2023, the Kagarama Primary Court in Kigali convicted Moise Emmanuel Bagirishya, the alleged driver of the vehicle that hit Ntwali, of involuntary manslaughter following a closed trial⁴⁹, according to news⁵⁰ reports⁵¹. The court also convicted him of involuntary bodily harm of a second person who was injured during the accident and fined him a total of 1 million Rwandan francs (US\$920 at the time).
24. In a joint March 2023 statement⁵², CPJ and 85 other organisations called for an independent and impartial investigation into the circumstances surrounding Ntwali’s death, citing the previous threats the journalist had received. The organizations also raised concern about the lack of transparency over the investigation and the closed trial, in which the defendant was sentenced after one hearing. They said that the lack of details in the verdict, such as the exact location of the accident, and the vagueness of a medical report on Ntwali suggested an ineffective investigation.

Recommendations

⁴⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists, “John Williams Ntwali,” CPJ, accessed August 22, 2025, <https://cpj.org/data/people/theoneste-nsengimana/>. John Williams Ntwali, editor of *The Chronicles* newspaper and founder of the YouTube-based Pax TV-Ireme News, died in a reported traffic accident on January 18, 2023; however, human rights groups have raised serious concerns about possible foul play and called for an independent, transparent investigation

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Rwanda: Suspicious Death of Investigative Journalist,” *Human Rights Watch*, January 20, 2023, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/20/rwanda-suspicious-death-investigative-journalist>

⁴⁹ Barron’s, “Rwandan Court Fines Driver Over Death of Top Journalist,” Barron’s, January 20, 2023, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://www.barrons.com/news/rwandan-court-fines-driver-over-death-of-top-journalist-01675796708>. The report notes that the trial had initially been closed to the public but was later opened briefly for journalists to witness the verdict announcement.

⁵⁰ The Associated Press, “Rwandan driver fined for involuntary manslaughter in reporter’s death,” AP News, [publication date not specified], accessed August 22, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/crime-legal-proceedings-rwanda-accidents-human-rights-ca0c424ade323c4d313ef21f3cdca85f>. The article reports that Moise Emmanuel Bagirishya was fined US \$920 after pleading guilty to involuntary manslaughter in the crash that killed investigative journalist John Williams Ntwali.

⁵¹ BBC News Gahuza, “Rwanda: ‘Uwiske by’impanuka’ umunyamakuru Ntwali J Williams yaciwe miriyoni imwe,” BBC News Gahuza, February 7, 2023, accessed August 19, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/gahuza/articles/clwr4v4nrvxo>.

⁵² Amnesty International, “Rwanda: Questionable Trial After Journalist’s Death,” Amnesty International (March 15, 2023), accessed August 19, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr47/6521/2023/en/>. This report—signed by 86 civil society and media groups—calls for an independent, impartial, and effective investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of journalist John Williams Ntwali, expressing concern over the hasty conviction of the driver and lack of transparency in the judicial process

25. Rwandan authorities should release all journalists imprisoned for their work unconditionally and without delay.
26. Rwanda should comply with the March 2024 opinion⁵³ of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, calling for the release of Théoneste Nsengimana and his co-defendants, an investigation into their arbitrary detention, and urging the government to accord them a legally enforceable right to compensation and reparations.
27. Authorities should desist from arresting journalists for their work and end a pattern of prolonged pre-trial detentions.
28. Rwanda should carry out credible and impartial investigations into allegations that prison officials have mistreated, tortured, and denied medical treatment to at least two detained journalists.
29. The government should ensure an impartial and transparent inquiry into the death of journalist John Williams Ntwali.
30. Authorities should desist from weaponizing journalism accreditation requirements to deny access or to criminalize the work of the press.
31. Rwanda should undertake reforms to laws that criminalize legitimate speech in line with regional and international human rights standards on freedom of expression, including at a minimum, articles 194 and 204 of the 2018 Law Determining offences and Penalties in General (the penal code) and article 39 of the 2018 Law on Prevention and Punishment of Cybercrimes.

⁵³ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Opinion No. 25/2024 concerning Rwanda," A/HRC/WGAD/25/2024, May 15, 2024, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session99/a-hrc-wgad-2-5-2024-rwanda-aev.pdf>.

