

15 March 2023

RWANDA: QUESTIONABLE TRIAL AFTER JOURNALIST'S DEATH

86 ORGANIZATIONS REITERATE CALL FOR AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

Rwandan authorities must allow an independent, impartial and effective investigation into the death of the Rwandan journalist John Williams Ntwali, 86 civil society organizations and media associations said today, reiterating a 31 January [appeal](#). A credible process should be carried out given the hasty conviction of the driver of the car allegedly involved in a collision with the motorcycle he was travelling on and the lack of transparency surrounding the investigation.

On 19 January 2023, Rwanda police [reported](#) that Ntwali died in a road accident in Kimihurura, Kigali on 18 January at 2.50 a.m. and that the driver of the car involved in the collision had been arrested. Ntwali, founder of the YouTube channel Pax TV- IREME News and editor of the private The Chronicles newspaper, exposed human rights abuses in Rwanda and had received threats in the past. Shortly before his death, he expressed concerns for his safety. Despite the suspicions surrounding his death and the high levels of interest in the case, no further details were provided until 7 February when the court told journalists that the trial had been held in just one session on 31 January, and that the driver had been convicted of manslaughter and unintentional bodily harm. The trial was held in the absence of independent observers or journalists. The verdict was delivered at the Kagarama Primary Court in Kigali.

The court's written decision says that the accident took place on an unidentified road near the University of Lay Adventists of Kigali, which the driver apparently took to avoid a police checkpoint on the main road because he did not have a valid motor vehicle inspection certificate. The written decision said that the speeding car hit the motorcycle from behind on the unlit road, knocking the passenger John Williams Ntwali to the ground. While Ntwali is said to have died on the spot, the motorcycle driver survived with minor injuries. The driver of the car was fined 1 million Rwandan francs (approximately 920 USD), having reportedly confessed to the charges.

The lack of details in the verdict suggests that there was no effective investigation into Ntwali's death, despite Rwanda's legal obligation to ensure that one was conducted, the groups said. The verdict does not give the precise location of the accident. It does not say whether there was any video or photo evidence from the scene of the accident, although it states that traffic police were called and attended the scene. It does not mention whether Ntwali was wearing a helmet, which is compulsory in Rwanda.

A medical report is referenced in the verdict, but the details are vague, stating simply that Ntwali's death was "caused by an accident in which he had suffered many bodily injuries, fractures, and had bled much blood." The verdict does not include information about who conducted the medical examination or where and when it took place.

Given the absence of these details, which suggest the lack of an effective investigation, and considering the lack of transparency around the trial, we, the undersigned organizations, [reiterate the call](#) on the Rwandan authorities to allow an independent, impartial, and effective investigation into the suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of John Williams Ntwali. We urge Rwanda's international partners, including the Commonwealth, to stand by their stated commitment to defend media freedom and to call on Rwanda to allow such an investigation, drawing on international expertise, to take place.

The groups are:

1. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT-RCA)
2. AfricanDefenders
3. Al Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development (Sudan)
4. Amnesty International
5. ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa
6. Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia
7. Baraza Media Lab (Kenya)

8. Bloggers Association of Kenya
9. Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (Ethiopia)
10. Center for Strategic Litigation (Tanzania)
11. Centre for Development and Research (South Sudan)
12. Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento (Mozambique)
13. Chapter Four (Uganda)
14. CIVICUS
15. Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform of Liberia
16. Coalition Burkinabè des Défenseurs des Droits Humain
17. Coalition des Défenseurs des Droits Humains au Benin
18. Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains
19. Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders
20. Coalition Togolaise des Défenseurs des Droits Humains
21. Commission de Justice et Paix (Central African Republic)
22. Committee to Protect Journalists
23. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
24. Commonwealth Journalists Association
25. Commonwealth Legal Education Association
26. Eastern Africa Editors Society
27. Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights
28. Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center
29. Federation of African Journalists
30. Federation of Somali Journalists
31. Gender Centre for Empowering Development (Ghana)
32. Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum
33. Human Rights Centre -- Somaliland
34. Human Rights Defenders Coalition Malawi
35. Human Rights Defenders Network-Sierra Leone
36. Human Rights Foundation
37. Human Rights Network for Journalists–Uganda
38. Human Rights Watch
39. Index on Censorship
40. Iniskoy for Peace and Development Organization (Somalia)
41. Institut des Médias pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (Togo)
42. Institute of Commonwealth Studies
43. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
44. International Press Association of East Africa
45. International Press Association of Uganda
46. International Press Institute
47. International Service for Human Rights
48. Kenya Editors Guild
49. Kenya Human Rights Commission
50. Kenya National Civil Society Centre
51. KUTAKESA (Angola)
52. Lawyers for Human Rights (Ethiopia)
53. Lawyers for Justice Sudan
54. Media Foundation for West Africa
55. Mozambique Human Rights Defenders Network
56. National Association of Black Journalists (United States)
57. Network of Human Rights Journalists, the Gambia
58. Observatoire des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda
59. Pan African Lawyers Union
60. PEN Eritrea
61. PEN Gambia
62. PEN Guinea-Bissau
63. PEN International
64. PEN Nigeria

65. Protection International Africa
66. Rede Caboverdiana dos Defensores de Direitos Humanos
67. Reporters Without Borders
68. Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale (REDHAC)
69. Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (Central African Republic)
70. Réseau Nigerien des Défenseurs des Droits Humains
71. Resource Rights Africa (Uganda)
72. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
73. Rwanda Accountability Initiative
74. Somali Journalists Syndicate
75. South African National Editors' Forum
76. South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network
77. South West Human Rights Defenders Network (Somalia)
78. SouthernDefenders
79. Sudan Human Rights Defenders Coalition (SudanDefenders)
80. Surbana Vision Medias and Community SVC Inc (United States/Eritrea)
81. Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition
82. The African Editors Forum
83. The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation (Malta)
84. Union of Journalists of South Sudan
85. Vision Ethiopian Congress for Democracy
86. West African Human Rights Defenders Network (ROADDH)