

## Burundi: Media Freedom at Stake Ahead of Presidential Elections

16 April 2020

<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/burundi-media-freedom-at-stake-ahead-of-presidential-elections.html>

A series of attacks against journalists in Burundi have raised concerns over increased threats to media freedom in the country. The International Federation of Journalists joins its affiliate, the Burundian Union of Journalists, in calling on the government to take steps to reinforce media freedom ahead of presidential elections.



*Credit: ONESPHORE NIBIGIRA / AFP Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza (R) walks on the red carpet as he arrives to inaugurate the new state house constructed by the Chinese aid in Bujumbura, during its inauguration on September 27, 2019.*

On 9 April, a journalist at independent radio station Isanganiro and his driver were abused by the members of the youth wing of the ruling party before deflating the tires of their vehicle. The journalist was investigating an attack on an official of an opposition party, the National Council for Liberty (CNL), in a village south of Bujumbura, Burundi's capital.

On 11 April, journalists from independent media were banned from attending the Minister of Health's press conference on Covid-19. Only journalists from state media or those close to the ruling party were invited, the UBJ reports. The UBJ has expressed grave concerns over the repeated attacks on media professionals in Burundi in the run up to the 2020 elections, due to be held on 20 May.

UBJ President Alexander Niyungeko, said "*It is regrettable that at a time when everyone is mobilized to fight against this pandemic, a minister of health strives to select which journalists can inform the public*".

IFJ General Secretary Anthony Bellanger said that the media, both public and private, has an important role to play in reporting the truth at a time when tackling the pandemic requires the most updated information and when citizens are about to elect their new president: "*Independent media must be allowed to perform their duties without any form of discrimination. The Government of Burundi must put an end to its systematic repression of independent media and journalists and create an environment conducive to press freedom and release all our colleagues that are jailed for just doing their job*", he said.