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“Pour un Etat de Droit, la Democratie et l’Egalité de chances” ; “For the rule of law, democracy and equal opportunity”

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Press release

STATE ORCHESTRATED CENSORSHIP WILL DEEPEN UNREST IN RWANDA

On 13th April 2010, the Media High Council (MHC) suspended for 6 months UMUSESO and UMUVUGIZI Newspapers. The censorship measures were aired only a couple of hours after President Paul Kagame, in an unprecedented abusive language, threatened to gag the publication of some independent media outlets considered by him to cause instability and or to belittle his infallibility and powers.

As the August 2010 presidential election looms, The MHC, a supposed-to-be independent body is backing the incumbent in his war against free media. We believe that the MHC did not fully examine the content and the spirit of the Law on Media Nr. 22/2009 of 12/08/2009, art. 16, 18, 73, 82, 83, 84 and 94, or for reasons well known to some of its members ignored the steps for penalties and rushed into censorship. How can this body pretend to protect the freedom of expression while it is enforcing government calls to muzzle the independent media prior to a presidential campaign? How do they brandish ethical values only when the government accountability is challenged and keep silent when pro and governmental media fuel media lynching against opposition leaders?

In an environment of restrictive provisions in freedoms’ laws, everybody expects a Media High council to push for the repeal of draconian provisions increasing criminal penalties, advocating suspension of media outlets, levying exorbitant fines and allowing censorship based on vague national security considerations.

We encourage both President Kagame and the Media High Council to let the newspapers UMUSESO and UMUVUGIZI run their normal business and to understand that critical coverage of public affairs and diversity in the expression of opinions are part of press freedom.

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