

## Burundi continues media persecution

A Burundian journalist was arrested over the weekend and handed over to the dreaded secret service, witnesses and his colleagues said, expressing fears over his well-being.



Image by 123RF

Egide Ndayisenga from Bonisha FM, a leading radio station, was arrested on Sunday morning in the northwestern city of Cibitoke, a witness said. "He was visiting friends," the witness said, adding that he was now in the custody of the national intelligence agency SNR, which is controlled by the presidency.

The 28-year-old's colleagues in the capital Bujumbura confirmed the arrest. One expressed "serious concern that he is being held by the formidable SNS."

Burundi has been plunged into a deep crisis since President Pierre Nkurunziza announced in April 2015 that he was running for a third term. He was re-elected last July.

Marked by assassinations on both sides, attacks against the police and summary executions, the violence has left more than 500 people dead and forced more than 270,000 to flee the country, according to the UN.

Burundi's government has sought to silence independent journalists at home and regularly lashes out at the international media, accusing the press of being part of a "conspiracy" to overthrow it.

Although officials in Cibitoke refused comment on the arrest, a police source said Ndayisenga was being questioned over possible links to opposition radio stations in Rwanda and his frequent visits to the neighbouring country.

Some 100 journalists have fled Burundi since a failed coup last year and most of them are in Rwanda. Ties between the two central African neighbours are strained.

Last month, AFP's Burundi correspondent Esdras Ndikumana was accused by Bujumbura of "promoting crime and violence" in his coverage and has since received threats on social media.

Ndikumana was tortured in August 2015 by security forces. Watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Burundi 156th out of 180 countries in its press freedom index.

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