



Agnes Uwimana Nkusi **Rwanda**

Agnes Uwimana Nkusi was the editor of the independent Kinyarwanda-language newspaper, Umurabyo, in Rwanda. Rwandan authorities arrested Ms. Uwimana in July 2010 with her colleague, Ms. Saidati Mukakibibi, and sentenced her to 17 years in prison under the country's genocide ideology and sectarianism laws. On April 5, 2012, her sentence was reduced to four years in prison.

Government authorities arrested Ms. Uwimana on July 10, 2010 after she published articles in Umurabyo that were critical of the Rwandan government and President Paul Kagame. The Rwandan High Court charged Ms. Uwimana with endangering national security, genocide denial, defamation of the President, and divisionism. Ms. Uwimana has faced similar charges in the past. In January 2007, government authorities arrested and imprisoned Ms. Uwimana for one year after she published an anonymous letter criticizing the government in Umurabyo.

On February 4, 2011, the High Court sentenced Ms. Uwimana to 17 years in prison: 5 years for endangering national security, 10 for genocide denial, 1 for divisionism, and 1 for defamation. Ms. Uwimana's lawyer requested a sentence reduction on the basis of her HIV-positive status, proof of which he submitted to the court; however, her plea was rejected.

On April 5, 2012, the Supreme Court cleared Ms. Uwimana on the charges of genocide denial and divisionism; however, the Court upheld her convictions for defamation and endangering national security. Ms. Uwimana's sentence was reduced from 17 years to four years in prison.

In recent years, human rights organizations have documented a trend in Rwanda of detaining journalists and government critics on charges, such as genocide ideology/denial and sectarianism. Although Rwanda's genocide ideology and sectarianism laws purport to prohibit hate speech, the government has been accused of utilizing the very vague and overly broad legislation in order to silence legitimate dissent. Numerous human rights organization have condemned Ms. Uwimana's arrest and conviction and have stated that the articles published in Umurabyo do not constitute hate speech.

On June 18, 2014, Ms. Uwimana was released after four years of wrongful imprisonment.

Freedom Now represented Ms. Uwimana as her international *pro bono* legal counsel along with counsel from the international law firm Hogan Lovells US LLP.