

11 September 2017

Tony Hall
BBC Director General
Broadcasting House
Egton Wing
Portland Place
London
W1A 1AA

Dear Mr Hall,

Re: Request for the suspension of Mr Ali Yusuf Mugenzi, Editor of the Kirundi-Kinyarwanda program pending a full investigation for breaching the BBC code of conduct and editorial standards.

As a British citizen with a dual heritage from the Kirundi culture and as a License-fee payer, I have been listening for some years the Kirundi-Kinyarwanda programs of the BBC and I have come to the conclusion that the content of the said programs fell dramatically short of the editorial standards and values of truth and accuracy, impartiality, editorial integrity, independence and accountability as published in the BBC's code of conduct and editorial standards.

Mr Mugenzi is the Editor of the Kirundi-Kinyarwanda radio and has caused frustration, despair and inconvenience to the twenty million listeners who are in the United Kingdom, the USA, Rwanda, Burundi, in refugee camps in Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda for broadcasting partial and inaccurate information, which undermine the BBC editorial integrity and independence.

The BBC-Kirundi-Kinyarwanda audience has been adversely affected by Mugenzi's editorial decisions, which are influenced by his personal and political interests.

Although I have felt unease with the content of the news coverage and the programs for many years, I would like to mention the deep failure (or the conscious refusal) to mention some important news last week for example.

Whilst the top news for the great lake region has been the coverage of the report of the Commission of Inquiry on crimes against humanity on Burundi and the decision of the Supreme Court of Kenya to cancel the presidential elections, the BBC Kirundi has failed to make a substantial report or a hint of those two events.

Firstly, for your inquiry, I would like the BBC to investigate the extent to which the BBC-Kirundi has failed to cover these major events in connection with the constant violations of human rights in Burundi.

1. Burundi: Commission of Inquiry calls on the International Criminal Court to investigate possible crimes against humanity. (4 September 2017)

2. Burundi: Persistence of serious human rights violations in a climate of widespread fear. (15 June 2017)
3. Burundi: Commission of Inquiry presents initial activities and observations. (13 March 2017)
4. Burundi: Commission of Inquiry calls for the cooperation of Government and all stakeholders. (27 January 2017)

The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights has made those press releases on these specific dates and the BBC Kirundi-Kinyarwanda failed to make substantive coverage on such prominent issues of human rights violations, which deeply concern the public at large.

Secondly, in order to have a better understanding of Mr Mugenzi's personal view and political interests, I recalled an interview he gave the BBC-DIRA YA DUNIA IJUMAA on 04 September 2015 on this link (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYpUPgvh1sk>). I have attached a full transcript and an English translation of the interview, which is given in Swahili.

Mr Mugenzi is being presented as the Editor of the BBC radio Great Lake region and an Expert on Burundi. His answers should have been "*truthful, accurate and unbiased as possible based on credible evidence from credible sources.*"

To the first question, his answer is biased, not true and partial. He seems to make a difference on the grounds for which some refugees are fleeing to Rwanda and others to Tanzania. Although, we all knew that the refugees were fleeing persistent political and ethnic persecutions from the militia youth organisation from the CNDD-FDD, the so called IMBONERAKURE, Mr Mugenzi has failed to mention this reason during the entire interview. He kept a vague suggestion that "*the situation in the country is not good and continue to be bad*". However, he is fast to counter balance this claim in adding that "*it is according to them.*"

To the third question, Mr Mugenzi failed to provide an answer to the the reason why Tanzania has predicted more refugees were likely to arrive: it is for geographical reason and the unrest following the breach of the constitution by Mr Nkurunziza. Tanzania shares with Burundi the longest border from the North-East through to the East and to the South. It is inevitable that once there is any surge of insecurity in Burundi, Tanzania will always be the first country to host refugees given the length of the border.

His answer provided a misleading impression that the reasons for which the Burundians were fleeing is more due to economic and financial grounds than to real threat to their safety. He also added that they were hoping to be resettled in the USA as other Burundians had benefited from the same scheme. He even claimed that the majority of the refugees in Tanzania was from just Makamba province and were returnees who had been to Tanzania. It is grossly false and there is no evidence or fact to make such a claim. The UNHCR had already published in September 2015 a record of refugees who are in Rwanda, Tanzania and DRC and the provinces of origin in Burundi. The record shows that all the provinces had been equally affected and the refugees were coming from the whole country.

As the presenter Kayira was expecting an answer he never received, he asked Mr Mugenzi again the same question for the last time. Mr Mugenzi's answer was controversial and biased. He stated that "*the violence was not in Bujumbura but limited to four areas of Bujumbura*". He also added that the situation in the rest of the country was calm. For Makamba province he also claimed that there had never been any violence before or after the elections in Burundi. His answer was inaccurate, biased and not true. Mr Mugenzi's answer gave a misleading impression that the situation in Burundi was calm and the refugees were merely fleeing for economic reasons and better conditions.

During the whole interview, Mr Mugenzi has failed to provide the reasons for which the refugees were fleeing Burundi and was concern not to disclose that the population' safety was being at risk due to the youth militia targeting political and ethic members who are known to be in political parties' opposition and Tutsi ethnic group.

When I was viewing the extract on YouTube, had it not been for the view of Mugenzi, I would have thought that I was listening to an interview given by a member of the current government of Burundi.

In a different interview he gave to the BBC radio in Swahili during the April and May 2015 demonstrations in Bujumbura, Mr Mugenzi went on to even state that “*the four areas in Bujumbura were mainly occupied by the Tutsi ethnic minority*”. By stating so, he gave the misleading impression that the demonstrations were ethnically motivated and made by the Tutsi minority group when the majority of the Hutu ethnic group were favourable to the announcement of the third term by Mr Nkurunziza. Again, his statement was far from the truth, biased and deeply concerning as this is a highly sensitive issue. The fact of the matter was that the population making demonstrations was not just made of the Tutsi but all ethnic groups were represented. However, for two years the government and the party CNDD-FDD are in the process of steering up ethnic tension and divisions to provide an excuse and justification for Mr Nkurunziza’s illegitimate and illegal mandate.

Thirdly, I have recently produced a research-paper on the evidence that Mr Nkurunziza has been in breach of the Constitution of Burundi since he entered office in August 2005. I have sent a copy to Mr Mugenzi on 24 August 2017 to the BBC Gahuza email account. Two weeks later, despite many texts messages sent to him, I have not yet received any acknowledgment that they have received my email. I have attached the document for your information. It highlights the failures and actions taken by Mr Nkurunziza, which provide evidences that he had the full knowledge his second term was his last one and therefore he already anticipated that he would have to breach the constitution to seek a third term. As a result of this paper, I have suggested to Mr Mugenzi to organise a debate on the respect of the rule of law and the constitution in one of the BBC program. He has failed to contact me so far. Given the content of his statements in different interviews submitted to the Swahili programs of the BBC and the editorial content of the news programs, I already anticipated that he would be reluctant to organise any debate for the BBC-Kirundi.

The BBC is regarded in high esteem and when the BBC speaks the world listen. This is even more so when the BBC speaks in different local languages. However, the editorial standards of the BBC-Kirundi is far short of the standards we have enjoyed when listening to the BBC news in English. This state of affairs has seriously undermined the BBC to such an extent that many Kirundi listeners have given up listening the BBC. This should not be the case. The values of democracy, the rule of law, respect of constitution, respect of human rights and freedom of speech should be protected, defended and cherished by the BBC.

These topics should have the priority in the editorial content choice for information and education. I hope that this letter would be the wakeup call for a full review of the selection process of editorial content of the news and other programs, its delivery and the monitoring process of the BBC-Kirundi.

Kind regards,

Pacelli Ndikumana

C.C.

- James Harding, Director of News and Current Affairs
- Mr A.Y. Mugenzi, Editor of the BBC-Kirundi-Kinyarwanda

Encl.:

- Copy of the full transcript and translation of the interview to the BBC-TV Swahili
- Copy of the research-paper: “Irrefutable evidences that P. Nkurunziza is in a blatant and constant breach of the constitution”.