

## Rwandan Authorities Should Ensure an Independent Investigation into John Williams Ntwali's Death

### *Joint Statement by over 100 Civil Society Organizations and Press Associations*

January 31, 2023 – Rwandan authorities should allow an independent, impartial, and effective investigation, drawing on international expertise, into the death of John Williams Ntwali, a leading investigative journalist, over 100 civil society organisations and media associations said today. Rwanda's international partners should press the authorities to allow and cooperate fully with such an investigation.

Ntwali's family was informed of his death on January 19, 2023, when the police asked Ntwali's brother to identify his body at the Kacyiru Hospital morgue. The police told the [New Times](#) that Ntwali died in a motorbike accident in Kimihurura, Kigali, on January 18 at 2:50 a.m. However, two weeks after the alleged accident, Rwandan authorities have failed to provide a police report, the exact location of the alleged accident, any photo or video evidence, or detailed information on the others involved in it.

A journalist who saw Ntwali a day before his death told [Voice of America](#) that: "He looked cautious and switched off his phone before we started talking... He said phones could not be trusted. He told me that all the doors on which he knocked were closed but he was determined to face life. His death was so sudden."

Ntwali was regularly threatened and attacked in pro-government media for his investigative reporting. In June 2022, he [told](#) Human Rights Watch:

I'm told that after CHOGM [the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting], they won't play around with us anymore. I've been told five or six times. I receive phone calls from private numbers. Some [intelligence] people have come to my house twice to tell me. NISS [National Intelligence and Security Services] has told me: 'If you don't change your tone, after CHOGM, you'll see what happens to you.'

Ntwali played a leading role in covering and bringing attention to the plight of Kangondo neighbourhood residents, who are in a long-standing dispute with the authorities over land evictions. At the time, [he told Al Jazeera](#): "I'm focused on justice, human rights, and advocacy... the three are risky here in Rwanda. But I'm committed.... Those who try to speak out, they are jailed - harassed, intimidated or jailed. Second, forced to flee their country. Three, some of them disappear in thin air. Or even, they die."

Ntwali was also one of only a few journalists in Rwanda independently covering [high profile, politicized trials of journalists, commentators and opposition members](#), and [posting videos](#) about their conditions in prison. In June 2022, he told Human Rights Watch about the [torture wounds he had seen](#) on some of these critics and opponents. Recently, he also published videos on his YouTube channel about people who had [suspiciously "disappeared."](#) His last [video](#), posted on January 17, was about the reported disappearance of a genocide survivor who had spoken out about being beaten by police officers in 2018.

Rwanda has an obligation, under international human rights law, to ensure an effective investigation into Ntwali's death. The right to life is enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and according to the [Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa](#), "States shall take effective legal and other measures to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of attacks against journalists and other media practitioners, and ensure that victims have access to effective remedies."

Rwanda's president is the Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth since the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, held in Kigali, Rwanda, in June 2022. The Chair-in-Office represents the Commonwealth at high-level international meetings and the Commonwealth Secretary-General's conflict prevention and resolution work for a two-year period. In the [Commonwealth Charter of 2013](#), member states reaffirmed their core values and principles, including upholding human rights, freedom of expression, the rule of law and the role of civil society.

The [Commonwealth Principles on freedom of expression and the role of the media in good governance](#), adopted by the Commonwealth Law Ministers in November, state that "Member states should act decisively to end impunity through impartial, prompt and effective investigations into all alleged cases of killings, attacks and ill-treatment of journalists and media workers, by prosecutions to bring the instigators and perpetrators of such crimes to justice and by the provision of effective redress for the victims."

Rwandan authorities have consistently [failed to ensure credible investigations](#) into and accountability for suspicious deaths of political opponents or high-profile critics, such as [Kizito Mihigo in February 2020](#). Therefore, regional and international experts, such as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions or the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights working group on the death penalty, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary killings and enforced disappearances in Africa should be involved in the investigation.

An effective investigation needs to be independent, impartial, thorough, and transparent, conducted in full compliance with the [Revised United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions](#) (The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death).

We, the undersigned organizations, urge Rwanda's international partners, including the Commonwealth, to stand by their stated commitment to media freedom and to call on Rwanda to allow an effective, independent and prompt investigation into the suspicious death of John Williams Ntwali.

The groups are:

1. Al Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development (Sudan)
2. Amnesty International
3. Article 19 Eastern Africa
4. Association Des Journalistes Indépendants Du Bénin

5. Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia
6. Baraza Media Lab (Kenya)
7. Bloggers Association of Kenya
8. Botswana Editors Forum
9. Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (Ethiopia)
10. Center for Strategic Litigation (Tanzania)
11. Centre for Development and Research (South Sudan)
12. Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (Nigeria)

13. Chapter Four (Uganda)

14. Coalition for Whistleblower Protection and Press Freedom

15. Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders

16. Committee to Protect Journalists

17. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

18. Commonwealth Journalists Association (International)

19. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (South Sudan) 20. Daryel Human Rights Organization (Somalia)

21. Digital Rights Lawyers Initiative (Nigeria)

22. Eastern Africa Editors Society

23. EG Justice (Equatorial Guinea)

24. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

25. Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center

26. Ethiopian Labour Rights Watch

27. Ethiopian Women Rights Advocates

28. Federation of African Journalists

29. Federation of Somali Journalists

30. Human Rights Centre Somaliland

31. Human Rights Foundation
32. Human Rights Network for Journalists–Uganda
33. Human Rights Watch
34. Inclusive Vision for Democratic Ethiopia
35. Index on Censorship
36. Iniskoy for Peace and Development Organization (Somalia)
37. INK Centre for Investigative Journalism (Botswana)
38. Institute of Commonwealth Studies
39. Inter Africa Group
40. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
41. International Press Association of East Africa
42. International Press Association of Uganda
43. International Press Institute
44. International Service for Human Rights
45. Isha Human Rights Organization (Somalia)
46. Kalkaal Human Rights and Development Organisation (Somalia)
47. Kenya Editors Guild
48. Kenya Human Rights Commission
49. Kenya National Civil Society Centre
50. La Maison de la presse du Niger
51. Lawyers for Human Rights (Ethiopia)
52. Ligue centrafricaine des droits de l'Homme
53. Maka Angola (Angola)
54. Media Foundation for West Africa

55. Media Institute of Southern Africa–Tanzania
56. Media Rights Agenda (Nigeria)
57. National Association of Black Journalists (United States) 58. Network of Ethiopian Women Association
59. Observatoire des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda
60. Patronat de la presse tchadienne
61. Patronat de la Presse Togolaise 62. PEN Afrikaans
63. PEN Gambia
64. PEN International
65. PEN Nigeria
66. PEN Sierra Leone
67. PEN South Africa
68. PEN Uganda
69. PEN Zambia
70. Premium Times (Nigeria)
71. Protection International Africa
72. Reporters sans Frontières
73. Resource Rights Africa (Uganda)
74. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
75. Rwanda Accountability Initiative
76. Somali Children Welfare and Rights Watch
77. Somali Journalists Syndicate
78. South African National Editors' Forum
79. South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network

80. South West Human Rights Defenders Network (Somalia)
81. Surbana Vision Medias and Community Services (US/Eritrea)
82. Syndicat National des Journalistes Indépendants du Togo
83. Syndicat National des Professionnels de la Presse de Côte d'Ivoire
84. Syndicat Professionnels Information Communication Sénégal
85. The African Editors Forum
86. The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation (Malta)
87. The Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum
88. Tiger Eye P (Ghana)
89. Union of Journalists of South Sudan
90. Vision Ethiopian Congress for Democracy
91. CIVICUS
92. Commission de Justice et Paix (Central African Republic)
93. Commonwealth Legal Education Association
94. Observatoire Centrafricain des Droits de l'Homme
95. Organisation Patronale des Médias du Gabon
96. Pan African Lawyers Union
97. PEN Eritrea
98. PEN Guinea-Bissau
99. PEN Togo
100. Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (Central African Republic)
101. Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition
102. World Uyghur Congress