

ARTICLE19

Digital Rights in Rwanda – UPR 51 Pre-session

4th Cycle Review

Date: 27 November, Geneva

Who We Are

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- ARTICLE 19, an international human rights organisation with ECOSOC Special Consultative Status.
- Founded in 1987, ARTICLE 19 promotes and protects freedom of expression and access to information globally through nine regional hubs, including ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa based in Kenya.
- Joint submission with Small Media, CIPESA & University of Birmingham
 - WWW.ARTICLE19.ORG

Thematic Focus

1. Protecting Freedom of Expression and Media Independence
2. Ensuring the Right to Information, Safety of Journalists, and Space for Dissent

Positive Developments

- *UPR Implementation Roadmap (2021–2026)*
- *Digitisation of public services*
- *Expansion of ICT infrastructure*
- *2021 Data Protection and Privacy Law, fully enforced in 2023.*
- *Constructive engagement with regional & international mechanisms*

Issue 1: Freedom of Expression & Media Independence

- Limited implementation of previous UPR recommendations
- Vague and broad speech offences remain in Penal Code e.g. “*spreading false information*,” “*harmful propaganda*,” or “*publication of rumors that may damage credibility*”
- Defamation remains criminalised
- *Article 2(19)* of the *Media Law* has not been amended to recognise bloggers, YouTubers, and other digital content creators.
- Media regulators, including the *Rwanda Media Commission*, lack structural independence.

Freedom of Expression Recommendations

- Repeal or amend vague speech offences and decriminalise defamation.
- Amend the Media Law to recognise citizen journalists, bloggers, and freelancers.
- Guarantee the independence of media regulators.
- End harassment and reprisals against journalists and conduct independent investigations into all cases of intimidation or attacks.

Issue 2: Access to Information & Civic Space

- No independent oversight body has been established to monitor compliance with the **Access to Information Law** (Ombudsman's mandate was removed)
- **Proactive disclosure** obligations remain weak and inconsistent across public institutions.
- Recommendations to **protect journalists** and **cease reprisals** have not been fully implemented
- Concerns about **harassment**, **intimidation**, and **restrictions** on the work of media advocacy organisations.

Access to Information & Civic Space Recommendations

- Establish independent ATI oversight body in line with [Article 17](#)
- Strengthen proactive disclosure across institutions
- Increase public ATI awareness & training
- Uphold the right of peaceful dissent and remove barriers on CSOs
- End harassment and reprisals against journalists and take concrete steps to address impunity

Coalition Acknowledgement

- Small Media Foundation
- ARTICLE 19
- The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)
- University of Birmingham.

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Download our Full UPR Submission on Digital Rights in Rwanda

<https://bit.ly/FullUPRSubmissionDigitalRightsinRwanda>



Questions

