

## ***Burundian Journalist and 13 others jailed for life***

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AfricaNews Monitoring Team with files from BBC

**Burundian journalist Hassan Ruvakuki and 13 others have been sentenced to life in imprisonment for an act of terrorism. Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza has defended the life sentence and said Hassan Ruvakuki was tried before the law not as a journalist but as a citizen who broke the law.**



But his lawyers said he was put on trial because he interviewed a would-be rebel leader.

President Nkurunziza is keen to show the world that his country is making progress after years of ethnic and political violence, according to the BBC.

Since his election in 2010, the government has been criticised by local and foreign human rights groups for its heavy-handed approach in dealing with dissenting voices.

Ruvakuki's life sentence sent shockwaves across the country, which is about to celebrate its 50th anniversary of independence from Belgium, our correspondent says.

The journalist was found guilty of involvement in an armed attack last November on a village in eastern Cankuzo province near the Tanzanian border. Fourteen gunmen who participated in the attack were killed.

Ruvakuki's defence team said that several days prior to the raid, he had travelled to Tanzania to investigate allegations that a new rebel group was being formed.

"Before someone is a journalist he is a Burundian," Mr Nkurunziza told the BBC.

He said that the government was unable to interfere with a case that had come before the courts.

"According to the constitution we must let justice do its work," the president said.

Some 300,000 people are said to have been killed in Burundi's 12-year civil war between the minority Tutsi-dominated army and ethnic Hutu rebels.

The conflict officially ended in 2005 with a peace deal which saw former rebel leader Mr Nkurunziza elected president but there are still sporadic attacks by some armed groups.

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