

Three Rwandan journalists of a Kinyarwanda-language news broadcaster on YouTube who have been detained since October 2018 have been released from jail, a judicial source confirmed in Kigali

The accused were facing charges related to inciting insurrection and spreading false information with the intent of tarnishing Rwanda's image abroad.

The released journalists are Jean Baptiste Nshimiyimana and his two colleagues Shadrack Niyonsenga and Damascene Mutuyimana who were arrested and imprisoned in 2018.

They were charged with spreading "false information or harmful propaganda" with the intention to cause hostile international opinion against the Rwandan government, causing uprising or unrest among the population and formation of and joining a criminal organization.

The trio had denied all the accusations

In December last year, the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC), a self-regulatory body announced plans to register YouTube channels operating as media in move that was described as in response to complaints received from the public.

However, RMC suspended the planned registration of YouTube channels later that month.

Reacting on the move, Muthoki Mumo, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) sub-Saharan Africa representative, hailed the court's decision saying CPJ was greatly relieved that the court has recognized the charges against Damascene Mutuyimana, Shadrack Niyonsenga, and Jean Baptiste Nshimiyimana as baseless.

"Finally, these journalists can go home to their families," Muthoki said.

One of their lawyers, Jean Paul Ibambe, confirmed to CPJ that the journalists were released from Nyarugenge Prison in Kigali on Wednesday evening, following the acquittal. The journalists were held in pre-trial detention until their trial started in August 2021. Earlier this year, prosecutors requested that they be sentenced to 22 years and five months in prison. (END)