

Opinions

The BBC living up to its poor journalistic standards

Olivier Mushimire

The New Times, August 31, 2022



The latest BBC article on alleged enforced disappearances in Rwanda, published on August 30, 2022, is evidence of the inability of this media outlet to depart from its self-destructive trajectory as far as its credibility is concerned. To put it mildly, the BBC professionalism is appalling and examples are many.

Consider BBC sources. One is Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza, a convicted criminal whose judicial record is not mentioned at all in the article. It is as if the BBC doesn't want its readers to know who Ms Ingabire is; this would greatly undermine her credibility and

by extension, the BBC's. The BBC simply mentions that her party is not legally recognized and that she is not allowed to leave country. No mention is made of the fact that Ms Ingabire was granted presidential pardon (with conditions) having served only 8 years of her 15 year prison sentence, after she was found guilty of collaboration with the FDLR as well as committing the crime of genocide denial. Yet, the BBC's deliberate omission deprives its readers of the legal justification behind Ms Ingabire's inability to leave the country and to register a political party.

BBC's readers know that Rwanda is not the only country where criminals serving their sentence outside of prison are not allowed to perform political activities or to leave the jurisdiction where the sentence was pronounced. In fact, any normal society enforces such prevention tools to keep the criminals in check and ensure the safety of its members. However, since the BBC is determined to portray Rwanda as an abnormal society, these details are simply shoved under the rug.

If necessary, witnesses are made up. Indeed, the BBC's second source is anonymous.

This would be okay if the BBC had not had a track record of failing to do basic fact-checks to assert the credibility of its reporting. These repeated failures should prevent any reasonable person from granting the BBC the benefit of the doubt. An anonymous source cannot be considered a credible source to support claims as serious as those of enforced disappearances leveled against a government.

Even more disturbing is the unfounded assumption that those who disappear are victims of the government's repression simply because they are members of political parties, whether legally recognized or otherwise. By failing to mention the criminal activities of Ms Ingabire, the BBC sets the ground for this assumption when a credible explanation of their disappearance could be that they simply chose to flee the country rather than face justice. There are many instances where alleged victims of enforced disappearances reappeared in neighboring countries where they

continued their subversive activities.

Most importantly, it should appear suspect that the BBC takes the allegations leveled against the government of Rwanda at face value while omitting the facts - proven in courts to be beyond any reasonable doubt - which led to the conviction of the BBC's unreliable "source", Ms Ingabire.

It is no secret that the BBC has been criticized time and again for its lack of professionalism. Recently, during the press conference that concluded the CHOGM 2022 held in Kigali, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland, and President Kagame faulted the BBC for its repeated failures to perform due diligence and to do basic fact-checks in their reporting. However, their criticism seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

As the saying goes, old habits die hard. The sclerosis is too widespread for one to expect the BBC's recovery.