

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/gabon-journalists-harassed-for-violating-24-10-2012,43576.html>

Africa - Gabon

Off-limits

Journalists harassed for violating taboo on ritual killings

24 October 2012

Reporters Without Borders condemns journalist **Olivier Ndembi**'s interrogation by the General Directorate for Investigation about his research into the alleged involvement of Gabonese politicians in ritual killings. A reporter for the pro-government daily *L'Union*, Ndembi was questioned on 18 October.

In a 14 April article on a subject usually regarded as off-limits in Gabon, Ndembi claimed that the identify of the instigators of many ritual killings was being concealed at a high government level but refrained from naming any of the alleged instigators for fear of libel suits.

The justice ministry ordered the Libreville prosecutor's office to arrange for Ndembi to be questioned and threatened with prosecution for "obstructing justice" if he did not cooperate by identifying the persons allegedly involved.

"The judicial harassment of journalists whenever they dare to investigate ritual killings and accuse politicians of ordering them is indicative of the collusion between the justice system and the political authorities," Reporters Without Borders said.

"By letting itself be used as a tool of intimidation, Gabon's judicial machinery is reinforcing the taboo on talking about ritual killings and is discouraging the press instead of shedding light on the persistence of this practice."

Reporters Without Borders added: "This is contrary to the wishes of President Ali Bongo Ondimba, who broke the taboo last April by organizing a crisis meeting with the aim of ending a phenomenon that leaves families in mourning and sullies the country's image."

Ritual killings are linked to Gabon's animist beliefs and practice of sorcery, in which the power of fetishes is said to be enhanced by the blood of men, women and children who have been mutilated alive and die in pain.

The widespread suspicion that politicians order ritual killings in order to win or hold on to office is reinforced by the reported increase in the frequency of such killings during elections or in the run-up to cabinet reshuffles.

In recent months several Gabonese journalists have tried to cover the alleged involvement of politicians in such killings and Reporters Without Borders is aware of several cases of threats being made against them. In response to the local media's protests, the prosecutor-general apologised on national television.

Intimidation attempts are not limited to coverage of ritual killings. As soon as journalists link politicians to any kind of criminal activity, the justice ministry initiates judicial proceedings and suppresses the story. For example, **Jonas Moulenda** of *L'Union* was charged by the Libreville prosecutor's office in May for suggesting that a well-placed person was behind a soldier's murder.

For more information on media freedom in Gabon, [read the Reporters Without Borders country file](#).

Photo : Olivier Ndembi

