

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/guinea-bissau-news-blackout-and-military-18-04-2012,42317.html>

Africa - Guinea Bissau

News control

News blackout and military censorship follow coup

18 April 2012

Last week's coup in Guinea-Bissau, in which Prime Minister Carlos Gomez Junior and Interim President Raimundo Pereira were arrested, has been followed by grave violations of the right to information, including threats to journalists, a news blackout and media censorship. We urge the new military government to restore the media's right to report news freely.

"The 12 April military coup has led to serious restrictions on the freedom to report news and information, although this is vital at times of political unrest, Reporters Without Borders said. "A news blackout, in which all radio and TV stations were closed, has been followed by military control of media content. We hope that the return to political and institutional normality promised by the ruling junta will result in full restoration of media activity."

At a meeting with media executives on 16 April, the military high command said they could resume operating as long as they did not mention that protests that have been taking place in the capital. The goal of "constructing peace and national unity" was cited as grounds for this restriction. Reporters Without Borders regards it as the introduction of military censorship.

As well as frequent power cuts and disruption of communications that prevented journalists from working properly, no radio or TV station was able to broadcast programmes or news reports during the weekend after the military high command suspended all media activity for the sake of "national cohesion."

"Anyone contravening these orders would have been exposed to severe reprisals or would have had to go into a hiding," a media source told Reporters Without Borders. Only Guinea-Bissau's state-owned *Radio Nacional*, which is occupied by soldiers, continued to broadcast music and military communiqués appealing for calm.

António Aly Silva, a well-known blogger ([Didatura do Consenso](#), "Dictatorship of Consensus"), was arrested and beaten by soldiers while he was photographing military installations on 13 April. They released him a few hours later but confiscated his equipment.

A few hours after attacking the prime minister's residence on 13 April, soldiers began controlling everyone entering and leaving the premises of *RTP-Africa*, a Portuguese news media. Soldiers threatened *RTP-Africa* journalists at gunpoint and stole cameras and other equipment from them.

Ranked 75th out of 179 countries in the 2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index, Guinea-Bissau has undergone frequent coups since independence in 1974. As a result of violence by the security forces and by individuals linked to drug trafficking, the climate is rather hostile for journalism and media freedom.

Reporters Without Borders issued a report on Guinea-Bissau in 2007 report entitled ["Cocaine and coups haunt gagged nation."](#)

Photo : Radio Nationale (AFP/Seyllou)

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