

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/mali-french-military-intervention-16-02-2013,44084.html>

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Africa - Mali

Invisible war

## French military intervention achieves “zero image of the war front” media objective

15 February 2013

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The United States warmly congratulated France today on [the success of its “Operation Serval” in Mali](#) but Reporters Without Borders regrets that France has had similar success with its goal of heavily restricting direct media coverage of the military intervention.

“The French authorities, supported by their Malian counterparts, have achieved their ‘zero image of the war front’ media objective for Operation Serval by [strictly controlling access to information](#),” Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said.

“Excessive citing of security grounds is seriously curtailing media freedom. While we can understand the French military’s stated desire to prevent reporters being abducted or attacked, the defence ministry should conform to the demands of democratic values by allowing the media to have direct access to the news rather than keeping them at a distance, as it has done until now.”

Ever since the start of the military operations in Mali several weeks ago, journalists have been kept away from the war zones and [denied the possibility of directly observing events and gathering information](#). As a result, the media have been prevented from deciding for themselves how they cover this war.

Both local and international journalists have expressed legitimate frustration about having to depend on the information provided by the defence and foreign ministries’ press services. Photos and video of military activity in Bamako have been illustrating reports in the absence of any images from the war front.

Nearly a week after the start of the French intervention in Mali, a few journalists were finally allowed to travel “embedded” with French troops. Reporters Without Borders welcomed this, while stressing that this should not be the only way of covering the war.

Several journalists subsequently expressed surprise that the French military authorities were allowing only reporters with the French state-owned media to be embedded with their troops.



**Matthias Gebauer**

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Suivre

press freedom in [#mali](#) means that france2 can go anywhere (north), anyone else has to hassle with the army who has these orders from paris

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12:23 PM - 27 Janv, 13 📍 depuis



**Guillaume B**

@Jolindien9



Abonné

Pour pouvoir bosser au [#Mali](#), il faut être de [@France2tv](#): 3 équipes embed (+1) derrières barrages maliens, tous les autres à 500km [#Serval](#)

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2:10 PM - 27 Janv, 13

Journalists were again prevented from working freely when the authorities allowed them to visit newly-liberated cities only under close guard and only several days after French troops had entered the cities. The journalists have to travel in [convoy](#)s accompanied by a dozen or more press officers.

Several foreign reporters described [strictly-timed visits](#) to areas of past fighting that were like tours of movie studio sets or amusement parks. One French daily said the French authorities were "extremely tense in their relations with journalists and the western media in general" (Maria Malagardis, *Libération*, 22 January 2013).

Mali distinguished itself by falling further than any other country in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#). Now ranked 99th out of 179 countries, it fell 74 places in part because of the harassment of community radio stations in the north but also because of media freedom violations in Bamako and the rest of the south [since the military coup in March 2012](#).

Reporters Without Borders is also concerned about the ethnically-motivated hatred and anti-Tuareg sentiment being expressed in some Malian media.

Photo : AFP Photo / Pascal Guyot

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