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Africa - Mali

Silenced media

Confrontation in northern city between jihadists and last journalists

8 August 2012

Reporters Without Borders roundly condemns the beating that radio presenter **Abdoul Malick Ali Maïga** received from jihadists in the northern city of Gao on 5 August after commenting on the fact that protesting residents had prevented them from amputating an accused thief's hand that morning.

Maïga had just made his comment and was still presenting the evening news programme on radio *Adar Koïma* (Joy of the Hill) when members of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) burst him in and took him away.

Adar Koïma journalist **Oumarou Mohamed Lamine** told Reporters Without Borders that the station is now off the air. "We are waiting for our colleague to recover and then we will reopen the radio station, perhaps at the weekend," he said. "The suspension of broadcasting is just a temporary decision."

On the media situation in Gao, Lamine said: "Of the six radio stations that used to broadcast in Gao, ours is the only one still operating. The population needs us in order to be able to have information about what is happening in the city. We are afraid that [the Islamists] will come back, but we will keep going."

Lamine added: "We are working with a skeleton staff and we have reduced the number of programmes. Now we just broadcast from 6 to 10 pm. We used to be 13 journalists but now we are just six. There are rumours that MUJAO still wants to target our station but we are determined to continue our battle. Our mission is awareness raising, education and information. Our evening news programme is vital for the population."

Reporters Without Borders is very disturbed by the gravity of this incident. It shows that a trial of strength is taking place between Islamists who want to impose the Sharia and deprive the population of independent news coverage, and media that are trying to survive amid the chaos and provide a minimum news service.

The *Adar Koïma* episode began on the evening of 4 August, when the station reported during its news programme that MUJAO was planning to amputate the hand of a young recruit who had been caught stealing. The next morning, a large number of residents gathered in Gao's Independence Square in order to prevent the punishment from being carried out.

In reprisal, the Islamists swooped on the radio station at around 8 pm, as Maïga was referring to that morning's events. Interrupting the programme, they took him off to an unknown location, beat him with rifle butts, and dumped him, unconscious, outside Gao's main hospital two hours later.

Maïga finally recovered consciousness at around 2 am. *Agence France-Presse* quoted a hospital doctor as saying he had abrasions over one eye and was still in intense pain.

The Islamists only released Maïga after Gao residents staged another demonstration outside police headquarters and, according to Radio France Internationale, set fire to the car of Aliou Mahamar, the MUJAO-appointed police chief who was blamed for the attack on Maïga.

"It is important that the journalists employed by Gao's last radio station should be able to continue working safely, especially as the station's closure would leave the city without any news media," Reporters Without Borders added.

Meanwhile, all is far from well in the south of the country. The press club and organizations that defend journalists' rights staged [a one-day media stoppage three weeks ago](#) in protest against an attack on **Saouti Haidara**, [the dean of Mali's press corps, three weeks ago](#).

[Long an example of freedom of information in Africa](#), Mali has experienced [a constant and dramatic deterioration](#) since a military coup in March and the occupation of the north of the country by various armed groups.

Photo : Members of Movement for unity and jihad in West Africa (MUJAO in french), in a street of Gao (AFP/Issouf Sanogo)

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