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Africa - South Sudan

Threatened with closure

## South Sudan's authorities threaten Catholic community radio

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**After closing down a radio station in the capital, the authorities are now threatening one in the western city of Wau.**

In civil war-torn South Sudan, government censorship seems to have found a new target, Catholic Church-run community radio stations. Just weeks after *Radio Bakhita* was forced off the air in Juba, the country's capital, *Voice of Hope* is now under threat in Wau, the capital of Western Bahr el Ghazal state.

Operated under the aegis of the diocese of Wau, *Voice of Hope* has been told it will be closed if it defies orders to ignore political subjects. Catholic Radio Network says this is not the first time the authorities in Western Bahr el Ghazal have threatened the station. In July, they banned the regional media from referring to the state's security problems.

Juba-based *Radio Bakhita*, which is run by the Juba archdiocese, was closed on 16 August by the National Security Service for broadcasting a report about clashes in Bentiu, in Unity State. It has since been allowed to resume broadcasting on condition that it refrains from talking about politics.

"Maybe it is not the primary job of community radio stations to cover political and security issues but avoiding them altogether is inconceivable in a country where the civil war affects the population's everyday lives so much," said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

"Furthermore, in South Sudan's sparse media landscape, community radio stations are often the only available source of news and information at the local level. By banning them, the government is committing an intolerable act of censorship."

According to Catholic Radio Network, the authorities cited the new media law as grounds for the threat to ban *Voice of Hope*. Intended to fill the legal void in which the media have operated since independence, the new law has been several years in the making and, although it took effect on 9 September, the final version has yet to be published.

International analysts were worried about the draft available last December because its regulation of journalistic ethics was overly restrictive and the media regulatory authority was to be under the president's control.

Ranked 119th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#), South Sudan has already left a [trail of media freedom violations](#) despite being the world's newest country.

*(photo: Voice of Hope journalist Matthew Miskin presents the El Shaba morning show/ Photo BBC Media Action)*

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