

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/kiribati-newspaper-still-awaiting-19-06-2012,42814.html>

Asia - Kiribati

Bureaucratic gag

Newspaper still awaiting publication licence after five months

19 June 2012

Reporters Without Borders reiterates its request to Taberannang Timeon, the Kiribati minister for communications, transport, tourism and industrial development, to grant a publication licence to the newspaper [Kiribati Independent](#) under the Newspaper Registration Act (1989).

"A registration application was submitted by the *Kiribati Independent* in December 2011 – why is it still under consideration?" the press freedom organization asked.

"This silence, accompanied by two ministerial orders issued to the newspaper to cease publication, constitutes a major obstacle to its work. The letter we wrote to Taberannang Timeon on 25 May (see below) has remained unanswered. The minister must grant the application by the *Kiribati Independent* as quickly as possible or explain why the application process is taking so long.

"A recent visit by the police to the newspaper's offices would appear to be a clear indication of deliberate harassment."

After checking with his lawyer, the newspaper's editor and publisher **Taberannang Korauaba** continued operating but consequently received two orders from the communications ministry to cease publication. The paper resumed publishing on 1 June, followed by the police visit to the editorial offices on 19 June.

[Pacific Scoop](#), a website run by the [Pacific Media Centre](#), today quoted Korauaba as telling the watchdog *Pacific Media Watch* on 6 June: "Our lawyer has responded to the Communications Ministry advising them that *Kiribati Independent* is not in breach of the law and if they believe so they must proceed with prosecuting the publisher."

25/05/2012 - Letter to the Minister for Communications, Transport, Tourism and Industrial Development of the Republic of Kiribati, M Taberannang Timeon

For the attention of Taberannang Timeon, Minister for Communications, Transport, Tourism and Industrial Development, Republic of Kiribati

Subject: Letter from Reporters Without Borders to Taberannang Timeon

Dear Minister,

Reporters Without Borders, an international organization that campaigns for freedom of information, seeks your response to the registration application by the *Kiribati Independent* under the Newspaper Registration Act (1988).

Five months after the application was submitted, the matter is still under consideration. Taberannang Korauaba, the *Kiribati Independent's* publisher and editor, and the printing firm Maria Printers, presented affidavits on 2 April identifying them as publisher and printer of the newspaper. The publisher and printer previously provided documents, in December 2011, when the newspaper first began publication.

KI staff have told us, however, that they were forced to shut down in March as a result of an order from your ministry to cease publication until registration was completed. On 18 May, your

office extended the ban without giving any reason for the delay in processing the application.

Although the law does not specify a time limit, five months strikes us as an unusually long wait and amounts to a significant impediment to the newspaper's activities.

Your spokesman Ruatu Titaake, in his instructions on 18 May, cited the Newspaper Registration Act as justification, saying the presentation of affidavits did not give the newspaper the right to publish.

However, Taberannang Korauaba believes that, now that the affidavits have been submitted, the newspaper has the right to continue publishing pending registration. Mr. Korauaba followed the same procedure previously when he launched another publication — the community newspaper *Tematairiki* — without encountering any such difficulties.

According to Professor David Robie, head of the *Pacific Media Centre*, other publications have been allowed to publish once their affidavits have been presented. This selective application of the laws appears to bear out Mr. Korauaba's fears that the real reason behind the order to halt publication and the delay in registration is a desire to muzzle the *KI* at its birth.

In March, the newspaper published a series of articles criticizing the government, which led to threats of legal action by President Anote Tong. We hope that there is no link between the content of these articles and the problems encountered by the *KI* in its registration application.

In these confusing circumstances, we hereby request that you provide a clear response to the *Kiribati Independent* and grant its registration application as soon as possible. In addition, we respectfully ask you to clarify the scope of the Newspaper Registration Act and how it is applied.

We hope that you will give this important matter your full consideration and we anticipate a positive response.

Yours sincerely,

Olivier Basille
Director General of Reporters Without Borders
