

Reporters Without Borders

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Africa - Equatorial Guinea

Poisoning suspected

Media freedom defender's mysterious death in late 2012

4 January 2013

Reporters Without Borders would like to voice its sadness about press freedom defender **Manuel Nzé Nsongo's** death in late November, together with its concern and suspicions about the circumstances in which he died, casting a disturbing shadow over Equatorial Guinea's media world at the year's end.

"Nsongo's death is an undeniable loss for the journalism community and media sector in Equatorial Guinea," Reporters Without Borders said. "The circumstances of his death have raised many questions and prompted various interpretations but it is still impossible to say with certainty whether he died of natural causes or was murdered. Rumours of poisoning are not unusual in Malabo after a government opponent suddenly dies."

Nsongo fell ill just a few hours after attending a working lunch with information, press and radio minister Agustín Nzé Nfumu and died two days later in a Malabo hospital. Relatives say he fell ill immediately after the lunch and suspect he was poisoned. As an autopsy was not carried out, there is no evidence to support their claims.

"Is it still possible to shed light on this case?" Reporters Without Borders asked "The government should issue a statement to dispel the suspicions under which it finds itself, and should order an investigation if the family requests one."

Nsongo was President Teodoro Obiang Nguema's head of protocol from 1979 to 1991 and held the same position at the foreign ministry from 1991 to 1994. He subsequently took up the cause of media freedom in 1996 and became the president of the Equatorial Guinea Press Association (ASOPGE).

He founded two newspapers, *El Tiempo* and *La Opinión*, in 2000 and had planned to set up an independent radio station, *Radio Solidaridad*. He also headed the Equatorial Guinea Journalists Network against HIV/AIDS and the Association for the Care and Protection of the Elderly.

His colleagues say he was atypical inasmuch as he became more and more involved with the independent media while trying to maintain a proximity to the government that was a hangover from time when he was the president's confidant.

Despite disagreements with the government and strong criticism of its policies, Nsongo always avoided direct confrontation with members of the president's inner circle, sources in Malabo and within the Equatorial Guinean diaspora say.

Controlled by a dictatorial regime, Equatorial Guinea is ranked 161st out of 179 countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. [More information about the state of the media and freedom of information in this country.](#)

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