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<http://www.rsf.org/car-international-community-urged-to-18-06-2014,46464.html>

Africa - CAR

Letter to authorities

International community urged to protect journalists in CAR

18 June 2014

Reporters Without Borders and other organizations that defend the media and the right to information have sent a joint letter to Central African Republic officials and international community representatives about the security situation in the CAR, which continues to be very worrying

Pointing out that many journalists are being subjected to harassment, intimidation, threats and violence, the letter urges the CAR and international authorities to do everything possible to respect and enforce the right to information, and to protect journalists in the course of their work.

"You don't check your facts. You lie. You say anything. We'll soon deal with you."

"We read your articles. You are calling for the army's return. We're going to come looking for you."

"Be aware that we know who you are and you don't know who we are. We advise you to say nothing and thank your God. Otherwise you'll soon know who we are."

"Bangui is small and there's nowhere to hide."

These telephone threats – some anonymous, some sent by people known to the recipient – were received in recent weeks by journalists in the Central African Republic or by members of the international NGOs that support the media there.

Even more disturbingly, two CAR journalists – Désiré Luc Sayenga and René Padou – died of the injuries they received in a brutal attack on 30 April, the circumstances of which, at a time of widespread violent crime, are still unclear. And more recently, French photographer **Camille Lepage**'s body was found during a road patrol between the western towns of Bouar and Baboua on 13 May. These tragic events reflect the climate of extreme violence and terror that prevails not only for the CAR's journalists but also for international reporters and the various media organizations carrying out programmes of support for the CAR media.

Ever since the Seleka rebels toppled President Bozizé's government in March 2013, succeeding governments have been unable to restore security either in Bangui or the interior of the country.

The CAR's media are trying to cover the various aspects of this conflict as best they can with almost no technical resources after being repeatedly attacked and ransacked. Some are trying to be professional but others have been guilty of violating journalistic ethics. The organizations that represent the CAR media are often the first to point out misconduct by their colleagues.

Nonetheless, unprofessional conduct does not justify the psychological harassment, telephone intimidation and physical violence to which journalists and media support organizations are constantly exposed in connection with their work. These threats pose a real threat to freedom of expression and information.

Here is a summary of known cases of persecution of journalists during the three months ending 31 May:

- 2 journalists fatally attacked in unclear circumstances
- 1 journalist killed in connection with her work
- 24 journalists subject to various forms of harassment
- 7 journalists threatened by telephone

- 3 journalists subjected to physical violence
- 4 journalists forced to flee the country because of threats
- 5 journalists summoned by judicial authorities
- 3 journalists arrested

Information is a powerful weapon during conflicts. The media are often manipulated but, at the same time, they make a positive contribution by promoting citizenship and good governance, encouraging respect between communities and preparing public opinion for peace. The media's strategic importance is therefore undeniable.

This is why many media support organizations are operating in the CAR. Their work helps to reinforce media professionalism and journalists' organizations. They are also assisting with the technical reequipping of many media companies and radio stations that were ransacked. All have the same desire to ensure that the CAR's media are vehicles of peace and not hate.

A more professional media community and the constant availability of good quality reporting are now essential if peace is to be restored in the CAR. Journalists, media owners, media representatives and international media support organizations all want to play their role, but they need an acceptable level of safety.

They have nonetheless been targeted in recent months by those who want to suppress media diversity and keep the CAR's media in the moral and economic limbo that characterizes their current existence.

We therefore call on the transitional government, the civilian, military, religious and traditional authorities and the international community's representatives to urgently address the plight of journalists in the CAR, to do everything possible to ensure respect for the right to information and the free flow of news, and to protect journalists in the course of their work.

Signed by:

CAR journalists' and media organizations :

Union des Journalistes Centrafricains (UJCA), Association des Radios Communautaires de Centrafrique (ARC), Observatoire des Médias Centrafricains (OMCA), Réseau des Médias Africains contre le Sida, la Tuberculose et le Paludisme (REMASTP/CA), Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH), Maison de la Presse et des Journalistes (MPJ) and Association des Femmes Professionnelles de la Communication (AFPC).

International organizations supporting CAR media :

Panos Institute Europe (IPE), Free Press Unlimited, Radio France Internationale, CFI (the French media cooperation agency), International Media Support, Internews, Search for Common Ground and Fondation Hironnelle.

NGOs that defend journalists and the right to information :

Reporters Without Borders and International Federation of Journalists

You can download those documents on our website :

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