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<http://www.rsf.org/comores-minister-seizes-newspaper-s-11-04-2012,42297.html>

Africa - Comores

Old-fashioned reaction

Minister seizes newspaper's supplement, suspends editor

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Reporters Without Borders is dismayed by Comorian interior minister Hamada Abdallah's decision to withdraw the state daily *Al Watan's* latest monthly supplement from distribution and to issue a decree suspending its managing editor, **Pétan Mouignihazi**. The supplement had a special report on corruption and waste in the state sector.

"The interior's minister's reaction reflects an outdated and simplistic view of journalism, with public-service media that follow orders, on the one hand, and privately-owned media that can express opinions, on the other," Reporters Without Borders said. "The minister needs to understand that public-service media are supposed to serve the public, not the state. The information in the offending report was of general interest.

"We call on President Ikililou Dhoinine to rescind his interior minister's decision and to reinstate Mouignihazi for media freedom's sake. The country's image and its good position in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index are at stake."

Last January, the president urged Comorian reporters to "conduct investigative journalism" into the corruption "afflicting the country." He also professed a "determination to ensure that, during my term of office, no journalists are deprived of their freedom because of their opinions."

But in a news conference this week, the interior minister said: "Any state media journalist who wants the freedom to write or speak has to conform to the government line, or have the intellectual honesty to go and work elsewhere, for a privately-owned news outlet. The government is not going to receive lessons from *Al Watwan*."

The 9 April issue of *Al Watwan Magazine* featured a special report headlined, "Public finances: chaos, waste and corruption." One of its articles, an extract of which was published by *Agence France-Presse*, condemned "criminal practices" in the management of the state's finances.

"The same practices and spending procedures, which were previously condemned as grave abuses causing structural debt accumulation, have never been rectified," the article said. "Spending procedures are tainted (...) and open the way to every kind of abuse in which the beneficiaries are often the officials involved." The article also accused the finance minister of "covering up" some of these practices.

According to *Agence France-Presse*, the supplement quoted an auditor as saying the situation allowed the government to "continue paying invoices for equipment that was not delivered and for work that was never carried out."

Photo: Ikililou Dhoinine, Union of the Comoros President (AFP/Ibrahim Yossouf)
