

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/cameroon-jail-sentences-for-three-05-12-2012,43762.html>

Africa - Cameroon

Bad start

Jail sentences for three journalists on eve of media conference

5 December 2012

Reporters Without Borders is appalled by this week's court decision to sentence fugitive journalist **Simon Hervé Nko'o** in absentia to 15 years in prison and to pass suspended two-year jail sentences on two other journalists, **Serge Sabouang** and **Robert Mintya**.

The sentences were issued just two days before a government-organized, three-day General Conference on Communication (EGC), which begins today in Yaoundé's Congress Centre

"The General Conference on Communication could not have begun in a worse manner," said Reporters Without Borders, whose Africa desk officer, Ambroise Pierre, is attending the conference.

"These grossly unjust and shocking sentences have just one merit – they confirm the urgency of the need to decriminalize media offences in Cameroon. We hope that the conference that starts today will not sidestep any issues, including the status of journalists, media responsibility, media laws and institutions, media regulation and self regulation."

Reporters Without Borders added: "This conference is not an end in itself. It should lead to concrete progress for media freedom and to reform of the media law."

The sentences passed on the evening of 3 December on Nko'o, then a reporter for the weekly *Bebela*, Sabouang, the editor of the bimonthly *La Nation*, and Mintya, the editor of the weekly *Le Devoir*, conclude a case that dates back to the start of 2010, when they requested an interview with presidential chief of staff Laurent Esso.

They sought the interview because they wanted Esso to comment on a document that apparently bore his signature. But their request led to charges in February 2010 that they had forged Esso's signature on what was a "forged document."

Nko'o fled while Sabouang and Mintya were arrested and put in Yaoundé's Kondengui prison. They remained there until November of that year, when they were released conditionally.

A fourth journalist, *Cameroun Express* editor **Ngoto Ngota Germain**, also known as **Bibi Ngota**, was also arrested in the same case and [ending up dying in Kondengui on 22 April 2010 for lack of medical attention](#).

Some Cameroonian media and journalists' organizations have in recent weeks been criticizing the General Conference on Communication, saying there was no prior consultation with the media sector. The National Union of Cameroonian Journalists (SNJC) has called for an "active boycott" of the conference.

[More on media freedom in Cameroon.](#)

Photo : AFP/STR

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