

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/democratic-republic-of-congo-attacks-on-journalists-on-the-04-11-2011,41343.html>

Africa - Democratic Republic of Congo

Letter to the authorities

Attacks on journalists on the increase since start of the election campaign

4 November 2011

Just over three weeks before the presidential election on 28 November, Reporters Without Borders and Journalist in Danger (JED), its partner organization in the Democratic Republic of Congo, have written to Adolphe Lumanu Mulenda Bwana N'Sefu, the deputy prime minister and interior minister. The two organizations, concerned about the increase in violence against media workers since the start of the election campaign, are asking him to do all he can to ensure journalists are able to carry out their work without being targeted.

Read the letter:

Adolphe Lumanu Mulenda Bwana N'Sefu
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior
Kinshasa
Democratic Republic of Congo

Paris and Kinshasa, 4 November 2011

Subject : Election campaign and violence against Congolese journalists

Dear Minister,

Reporters Without Borders, the international press freedom organization, and Journalist in Danger, its partner in the Democratic Republic of Congo, wish to express their profound concern at the growing violence against Congolese journalists and media organizations in recent days.

This year, as the election draws near, the atmosphere has not been conducive to a calm working environment for the media. Since August, and more so since the official start of the campaign at the end of October, direct and indirect attacks on media organizations and their staff have increased.

We fear that the situation is rapidly getting out of control and journalists are no longer able to do their job in freedom and safety.

Odon Mwamba, a reporter for the privately-owned newspaper *La Grogne*, was arrested by police on 23 October and held for 72 hours for "injurious imputation" arising from an article that had not yet been published about an alleged relationship between a priest, Father Twité, and a local girl. He is expected to appear before the public prosecutor shortly.

The television station *Congo Media Channel*, owned by opposition politician Kudura Kasongo, was evicted from its offices in the Kinshasa district of Gombe by policemen who threw its equipment out of the window, claiming that the landlord no longer wanted any tenants in the building. However, *CMC TV* was the only tenant that was evicted.

Two days later, two trainee journalists with *Radio Okapi*, **Mireille Kanzoka** and **Tania Mulenda**,

were questioned near a demonstration by an opposition party that they were covering in the Kasa-Vubu district. They were released after they were searched and threatened and their equipment was seized.

Serge Kayeye, a cameraman with *Radio Mont Carmel Télévision*, was questioned by police officers on 28 October while he was reporting on the election campaign in Dibindi. His camera was confiscated and he was released after several hours.

On the same day, during a demonstration in Kinshasa by *CMC TV* journalists to express their discontent at their eviction, **Guy-Roger Tshitenge**, one of the station's journalists was detained and questioned for three hours. His colleague **Nathalie Kalombo** was beaten up by the police who were sent in to break up the demonstration.

Pierre Tshishiku, a cameraman with *Radio Lisanga Television*, was taken in for questioning by police while he was filming demonstrations by the opposition party Union for Democracy and Social Progress on 29 October in Muya. He was freed two days later.

In Uvira, a radio presenter has gone into hiding, fearing arrest over comments made by a member of an opposition party that displeased local officials.

A young journalist working for the community radio station *Ushirika (Racou FM)* was abducted by armed men in Rutshuru on 31 October, presumably because he had in his possession photos of opposition parliamentary candidates. He has not yet been released.

Finally, we are concerned about the behaviour of some activists and political sympathisers, particularly in the east of the country, who, instead of using their right of reply when they are unhappy at the treatment received by their candidate, have taken to going in person to journalists' homes or editorial offices.

This disrupts the organisation and smooth operation of business and can create a climate of fear among reporters worried that things might get out of control and fearful of possible threats and physical attacks. Such actions should be publicly condemned by the Congolese authorities.

While security forces directly under your control are behind some of the violations and not others, we believe that in both cases it is within your duty as interior minister to ensure respect for journalists.

For this reason, Reporters Without Borders and Journalist In Danger ask you to make every effort to put an end to the intimidation to which journalists are subjected, from the police and as well as from ordinary citizens.

With just three weeks to go until the presidential election, and while the campaign is in full swing, candidates from across the political spectrum will continue to express their views and to appear in the media.

It is essential, therefore, that journalists be allowed to carry out their work without being treated as targets. The election campaign and the presidential ballot must take place in a climate of moderation, with the greatest respect for freedom of expression.

We trust you will give this matter your careful consideration.

Sincerely,

Jean-François Julliard
Secretary-general, Reporters Without Borders

Donat M'Baya Tshimanga
President, Journalist in Danger

Photo of the Kinshasa marches (Gwenn Dubourthoumieu / AFP)
