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Africa - Congo

Second deportation

Are the Congolese authorities planning to expel all the journalists who do their job?

29 September 2014

The latest victim, Brazzaville-based Cameroonian journalist Elie Smith, was the victim of an attack in his home earlier this month

Four days after expelling independent journalist **Sadio Kante Morel**, the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) has done it again, this time deporting **Elie Smith**, a Brazzaville-based Cameroonian journalist. The interior ministry accused him of subversion.

Employed as a producer and programme host on *MNTV* (a station owned by the president's brother, Maurice Nguesso), Smith was expelled on 26 September with a "strict prohibition" on returning.

Speaking in the Cameroonian city of Douala, Smith told Reporters Without Borders: "A dozen plainclothes policemen came to my office to get me. They didn't let me take anything except my passport. They escorted me like a criminal to the airport where they showed me an expulsion order signed by the interior minister."

The deportation order accused him of "many seditious and subversive acts," "secret dealings with foreign powers working against the Republic of Congo's interests" and "excessive political activism."

"Smith's deportation is not only outrageous but also very disturbing for the future of freedom of information in Congo-Brazzaville," said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa bureau.

"Are the Congolese authorities planning to expel, one by one, all the journalists who do their job? We urge the government to end this wave of censorship, which casts serious doubt on its readiness to provide its citizens with democratic guarantees during the coming referendum and elections."

Smith was the victim of a [violent home invasion](#) on 10 September, three days after posting photos on his Facebook page of badly injured activists who, he said, had been beaten up by members of a special police unit as they left an opposition meeting.

Police director-general Jean-François Ndenguet initially said he would find the perpetrators of the home invasion. But Smith's repeated calls on the police to also arrest those who gave the orders must have annoyed Ndenguet, known for having already threatened journalists, including Smith.

The home invasion was unanimously condemned by media organizations and several international organizations. [The European Union delegation and the embassies of EU member countries](#) issued a joint statement voicing the hope that Smith would be able to "continue working with his characteristic professionalism, without fearing a new attack on himself or a member of his family."

The first person to report that Smith had been the target of an attack at his home was Kante Morel, the journalist who was herself [expelled on 22 September](#), shortly after being held at the police general-directorate for several hours.

The message is clear – it is hard being a journalist in Republic of Congo, which is ranked 82nd out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

(photo: Elie Smith)

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