

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/niger-after-much-progress-30-07-2012,43122.html>

Africa - Niger

Freedom and responsibility

## After much progress, unprofessionalism causes major problems for media

30 July 2012

What with a newspaper being banned, another newspaper receiving a warning and a publisher getting a jail sentence, July has taken a heavy toll on the media in Niger. This past month has highlighted the fragility of Niger's press, which has won more freedom but needs to become more professional in order to hold on to it.

### **Press offences decriminalized, much more freedom**

Ever since [a 4 June 2010 decree on media freedom](#), defamation, public insults and other media offences are not longer punishable by imprisonment. Pre-trial detention for media offences is also prohibited. Fines and damages are the only penalties that can now be imposed on the media.

At the end of a visit to Niamey in June 2011, Reporters Without Borders hailed the improvement in media freedom in Niger and issued a report covering both Niger and Guinea entitled "[Turning the page.](#)"

In November 2011, President Mahamadou Issoufou continued a policy begun by the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSR), the former transitional government, by becoming the first African head of state to sign [the Declaration of Table Mountain](#), which calls for the decriminalization of media offences and puts media freedom at the centre of policy-making in Africa.

As a logical result of these ambitious reforms, government behaviour that benefitted the media and the almost total absence of media freedom violations, Niger [advanced spectacularly in the 2011-2012](#) Reporters Without Borders press freedom index, going from 104th to 29th, a leap of 75 places.

But the situation is fragile. The behaviour of certain journalists who show little respect for professional conduct and ethics is liable to reinforce the position of those who criticize the decriminalization of media offences.

Reporters Without Borders continues to maintain that decriminalization does not mean the freedom to publish or broadcast content of any nature whatsoever. There is no freedom without responsibility. We reiterate the call we made in Niamey: decriminalization constitutes a spectacular advance for freedom, but must go hand in hand with scrupulous respect by journalists for the rules of professional ethics. In other words, journalists must be equal to this freedom and must deserve the trust that the authorities place in them.

"Libel, slander, lies and invasion of privacy are the negation of ethical journalistic behaviour," Reporters Without Borders said. "If people use the media to harm other people, ruin their reputation and just put out false information, they will inevitably be punished. There is a danger that the lack of ethics on the part of some people writing articles will undermine the media freedom that was won at such cost.

"This situation should alert the authorities to the need to reinforce press freedom and to support media that adhere to journalistic ethics. Allocating more staff and funds to the National Communication Monitoring Body (ONC), which regulates the media, providing financial

assistance to ONIMED (the media self-regulatory body), supporting the Niger Press Club, and giving journalists more professional training are all concrete ways to help protect media freedom.”

### **Jeunesse Infos editor jailed for “forgery”**

**Marcus Issaka Lawson**, the editor of the newspaper *Jeunesse Infos*, was sentenced on 2 July to nine months in prison, three of them suspended, on a forgery charge for publishing an article that he falsely portrayed as having being written by Adama Gazibo, a judge and former government general secretary, in response to his newspaper’s criticism of her in an earlier issue.

Headlined “I am not who you think I am” and published in the 13 June issue, the article made up by Lawson went into Gazibo’s private life, absolved the press of its errors and indirectly congratulated Jeunesse Infos on its reporting. Lawson has already begun serving the sentence.

### **Newspaper closed, another warned**

The ONC banned the newspaper *Le Mandat* for good on 24 July for ignoring the warning it was given in June. The regulatory body said *Le Mandat* had not corrected its editorial policies since being warned on 20 June that an article in issue No. 15 “contained false information that violated the privacy of members of the public and undermined morality and public decency.”

In a separate case the same day, the ONC issued a written warning to the newspaper *Le Visionnaire* accusing it of ignoring the warning it was given earlier in the month for publishing an article in issue No. 91 of 23 April that “contained false information and unfounded accusations.”

*Le Visionnaire* was suspended from the National Association of Independent Press Publishers (ANEPI) in 2011 on the grounds that its publisher had used it to settle personal scores and make false accusations against the head of a privately-owned Niamey company whose wife had just been fired.

Photo : After much progress, unprofessionalism causes major problems for media

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