

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/papua-new-guinea-three-tv-journalists-sidelined-for-08-11-2013,45441.html>

Asia - Papua New Guinea

Forbidden criticism

## Three TV journalists sidelined for criticizing prime minister

8 November 2013

Reporters Without Borders condemns the abusive measures taken against three respected journalists with the state-owned *National Broadcasting Company (NBC)* because of news coverage critical of the prime minister that the government regarded as "biased" and reflecting "opposition viewpoints," according to the *Post-Courier* and other local papers.

"NBC's statement about an alleged 'breach of standing NBC editorial policy guidelines and failing to adhere to instructions' will put pressure on the media to censor themselves, as will the prime minister's personal warning to media carrying 'false or defamatory reports against the government'," Reporters Without Borders said.

"We regret that *NBC* complied so readily with orders that clearly flout the principle of editorial independence. The virtual dismissal of these journalists has exposed the fragility of public media independence and freedom of information.

"It is essential that journalists should be able to work without fear of losing their jobs or being prosecuted. Otherwise, self-censorship is likely to spread. These three journalists must be restored to their positions in *NBC* and the harassment of personnel must stop at once."

Prime Minister Peter O'Neill's government objected to *NBC*'s coverage of a corruption case allegedly involving the government and its coverage of the recent controversial nationalization of the Ok Tedi mine, 37 per cent of which was owned by the state and 63 per cent was owned by a charity, the Papua New Guinea Sustainable Development Programme (PNGSDP).

PNGSDP was created in 2001 after the mine's owner, BHP Billiton, surrendered its ownership to avoid paying compensation for an unprecedented case of environmental pollution in 1984, when tons of toxic waste were dumped in the River Fly. A major part of PNGSDP's revenue went to victims of the disaster. Former prime minister Mekere Morauta was fired as its chairman as a result of the nationalization.

**Mark Davis**, an Australian journalist who was the PNGSDP's communications director, was deported back to Australia yesterday on the government's orders. He blamed his expulsion on his press releases critical of Prime Minister O'Neill. **Michael Asagoni**, *NBC Radio news* editor, and **Dick Sorariba** and **Mulai Robby**, executive producers with the *NBC* television station *Kundu 2*, were relieved of their posts on 1 November and were assigned to *NBC*'s archive department. At the same time, two other veteran journalists, **Jerry Ginua** and **Wesley Manuai**, were summoned and questioned.

The case, which [Pacific Media Watch](#) has been following, is all the more worrying as it comes against a backdrop of other disturbing developments for the country's media.

The *Australian Associated Press (AAP)* closed its bureau in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea's capital, on 1 November, ending a 60-year presence in the country. The *AAP* said it took the decision because the bureau was not paying its way. The bureau chief was one of the few foreign correspondents still based in Papua New Guinea.

At the same time, the government is reportedly drafting a bill that would restrict the foreign media presence in Papua New Guinea. Like Fiji's existing Media Industry Development Decree, it would require majority national ownership of news media although it remains to be seen whether this requirement would be limited to TV stations.

The media that could be affected to still unknown degrees because they are foreign owned include *EMTV*, two daily newspapers, *the Post-Courier* (Australia) and *the National* (Malaysia), and three radio stations, *Nau-FM*, *Yumi-FM* and *Legend FM Bikpla* (Fiji).

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