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## **Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville) - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 29 April 2009**

### **Information on treatment of journalists in Congo Brazzaville who speak out against the Government**

A report by the *US Department of State* under the heading '2008 Human Rights Report: Republic of the Congo' and the subheading 'Freedom of Speech and Press' states:

"The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and of the press, but also criminalize certain types of speech, such as incitement of ethnic hatred, violence, or civil war. The government at times limited freedom of speech and of the press. Broadcast journalists and government print media journalists practiced self-censorship. The nongovernment print media experienced fewer constraints as long as its reporting stayed only in print form and was not broadcast.

Individuals could criticize the government publicly or privately without reprisal on relatively minor issues. However, persons feared reprisal if they named high-level officials while criticizing government policies. The government generally did not proactively attempt to impede criticism by, for example, monitoring political meetings, but sometimes punished critics after the fact." (US Department of State (25<sup>th</sup> February 2009) *2008 Human Rights Report: Republic of the Congo*)

This report also states:

"In September police severely beat Digital Radio Television (DRTV) news reporter Giscard Mayoungou as he was covering a disturbance at a Brazzaville university. Witnesses said Mayoungou clearly identified himself as a reporter but police continued to beat him while they beat students and others caught up in the disturbance. DRTV filed a complaint against the police but authorities did not take action by year's end." (Ibid)

This report also states:

"In July a freelance journalist and documentary filmmaker reported receiving threats from government officials after airing a documentary she made about ongoing water shortages in Brazzaville. The documentary, which included criticism of the government's failure to fix the water problems, was shown once at a cultural center in the Centreville District of Brazzaville; it was not shown again after the journalist received the threats."(ibid)

An article by *United Nations News* under the heading 'UNESCO chief deplores deaths of journalists in Republic of Congo, Madagascar' states:

“16 February 2009 – Stressing the importance of freedom of expression, the head of the United Nations agency tasked with upholding press freedom today condemned the deaths of journalists in the Republic of the Congo and in Madagascar.

Bruno Ossébi, a columnist for the online newspaper Mwindi who was known for writing about alleged high-level corruption, died in a military hospital in Brazzaville on 2 February.

The 43-year-old journalist was reportedly recovering from injuries from a suspicious fire that broke out in his home in late January, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.”(United Nations News (16<sup>th</sup> February 2009) *UNESCO chief deplors deaths of journalists in Republic of Congo, Madagascar*)

This article also states:

“The Director-General also condemned the killing of a Malagasy reporter for Radio et Télévision Analamanga (RTA), who was shot while covering an anti-government demonstration outside the presidential palace in Antananarivo on 7 February.” (Ibid)

A Freedom of The Press report by *Freedom House* states:

“According to the Kinshasa based press freedom organization Journaliste en Danger, no direct attacks on journalists in Congo-Brazzaville were recorded in 2007. However, two local television journalists reported receiving threats in June in connection with their coverage of the opposition during that month’s legislative elections. Self-censorship by journalists in response to subtle intimidation remained a problem.” (Freedom House (29<sup>th</sup> April 2008) *Freedom Of The Press - Congo, Republic of (Brazzaville) (2008)*)

A report by the *Committee to Protect Journalists* under the heading ‘Republic of Congo TV station suspended for political footage’ states:

“New York, April 10, 2009--Authorities in Republic of Congo should immediately lift their ban on private TV station Canal Bénédiction Plus (CB Plus), the Committee to Protect Journalists said today. The ban was enacted in February in response to political coverage in the lead-up to presidential elections in July.

CB Plus was forced off the air on February 12 shortly after it aired footage of a 1991 national political convention that marked a transition from the one-party rule of President Denis Sassou-Nguesso to a multiparty democracy, according to local news reports and local journalists. Jacques Banaganzala, the president of the national media regulator--the state-run High Council on Freedom of Communication (known by its French acronym CSLC)--told CPJ he ordered the station off the air because the footage included "violent" and "abusive" statements, including testimonies about the 1977 assassination of former President Marien Ngouabi.”(Committee to Protect Journalists (10<sup>th</sup> April 2009) *Republic of Congo TV station suspended for political footage*)

This report also states:

"It's outrageous that a broadcaster should be censored for telling the people of Congo their own history" said CPJ's deputy director, Robert Mahoney. "We call on authorities in Brazzaville to immediately let CB Plus return to the air and allow the media to cover all sides in the lead-up to the July presidential elections."  
(Ibid)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

**References:**

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