

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Reporters sans frontières

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Written submission by Reporters Without Borders on the state of freedom of information and media circulation in Nigeria

Information taken from February 2009 UPR (4th session)' summary of stakeholders, RSF sent the following submission

41. RSF indicated that Nigeria's Senate has passed in 2006 a Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill granting the media and the general public the right to request information on government business from government agencies or from private bodies performing public functions, but that in August 2008, the bill had not yet been approved by the Assembly. CHRI reported that when the Bill reached the House of Representatives, after much delay, in June 2008, it failed for the seventh time during the third reading. RSF deplored the lack of political will from the government to cooperate on the reform of the press law, for example, or to show more transparency and openness to proposals made by local or international NGOs whenever a journalist is arrested. It recommended that the Government scrap the existing press law and adopt a new legislation adapted to democratic standards, eliminating prison terms for press offenses and providing a credible regulation tool for the media.

Recommendations made:

26. Ensure that freedom of expression is respected and that Nigerian journalists may take on their mission of providing information without suffering harassment (France); That the rights of journalists to report, comment on and criticize government policy freely and without fear, be respected (Canada).

No specific information found other than the fact that by mid-term Nigeria failed to implement 63 of the 79 recommendations made.

Overview of the press freedom situation

- - Nigeria is now ranked 115 out of 179 countries listed in the 2013 worldwide press freedom index. Up 11 points from the previous year (126)
- - 1 journalist killed in 2012 for his journalistic activity - **Enenche Godwin Akogwu** (Channels TV)
- - A few others have also been killed or found dead in 2012 but it is not clear yet whether the killings are linked to the journalistic activity of the victims.
- - There is already one killed journalist in 2013 (in January) but Reporters Without Borders is still not sure about the reason for the murder.

Latest press release from RSF published on May 7, 2012.

The country does have a diverse media and a flourishing Internet scene however and the senate passed a law in 2011 giving public access to official information as long as it does not affect national security. But threats, intimidation, physical attacks and unlawful arrests of journalists have remained at an alarming level.

Following World Press Freedom Day on May 3, Reporters Without Borders has taken a look at the breaches of freedom of news and information in Nigeria during the first quarter of 2012, turning the spotlight on one of the most dangerous countries in Africa for journalists. For the first time, it has included the Islamist militia Boko Haram in its latest [list of Predators of Freedom of Information](#), just published.

The press freedom organization outlines all breaches of freedom of information recorded between 24 December 2011 and 24 March 2012. It highlights the almost daily arrests and assault of journalists and the obstruction of access to, and distribution of, information, and describes the insidious atmosphere in which journalists have to carry out their work.

During the period in question, Reporters Without Borders recorded: the murder of one journalist, the killing of another with no proof that it was linked to the victim's work, nine assaults, seven arrests, three journalists threatened, four instances of seizure of equipment or deletion of files, three cases of access to information being cut off, three court cases against journalists and news organisations, the closure of a press centre and a media outlet's premises vandalised.

The report also covers disturbances in April when there were [bomb attacks on the offices of two newspapers, in Abuja and Kaduna](#).

Whether these abuses – obstruction of information and control of the government's image, or gratuitous violence and threats – were carried out by the government or private organizations using armed groups, they confirm the authorities' desire to silence journalists who try to report on the instability now gripping the country.

Nigeria embodies a paradox. On the one hand, it is a country where freedom of news and information is effective so far as the pluralism and vitality of the media are concerned, and on the other, it has one of Africa's worst records for infringements of press freedom and a worrying level of danger for journalists.

Threats and violence

On 26 April 2012, there has been bombings targeting newspapers in the capital, Abuja, and the northern city of Kaduna.

Reacting to the two bombings, which killed at least nine people, President Goodluck Jonathan issued a statement stressing the government's commitment "to uphold citizens' constitutional rights to freedom of expression and press freedom in particular."

While hailing President Jonathan's pledge to defend press freedom, there is no longer any doubt that the media and journalists are among the targets of those who carry out attacks and bombings in Nigeria. In consultation with media owners and executives, the authorities should adopt concrete measures to ensure that journalists are protected and to reinforce security around news media buildings and offices.

In Abuja, a suicide bomber drove a jeep carrying explosives into the building housing the printing

press of *ThisDay*, one of the country's most influential, privately-owned newspapers, killing himself and four other people and wounding dozens of others. *ThisDay* nonetheless said it had reinforced security around its premises in response to the violence that has killed at least 400 people since the start of the year.

At the same time, a car laden with explosives was stopped as it approached a building in Kaduna that houses the regional offices of *ThisDay*, *The Moment* and *The Daily Sun*. One of the two men in the car got out and detonated a bomb that killed at least four people and wounded around 20 others.

While the bombings were not immediately claimed, they bore the hallmarks of the Islamist group Boko Haram, which accused the national media a few weeks before of reporting falsehoods about it. One of the two men involved in the Kaduna bombing, who was detained by witnesses and handed over to the police, reportedly identified himself as a Boko Haram member.

Since 14 March 2012, when it became known that talks were taking place between Boko Haram and the government, the freelance journalist **Ahmad Salkida** has received several anonymous telephone threats. The reporter, who has covered the activities of Boko Haram for several years, was accused among other things of being a member of the Islamist group and of being the instigator of the talks. He was also told that he and the group "are not supposed to exist". In July 2011, he was forced to move away from the northern city of Maiduguri after receiving threats from people claiming to belong to Boko Haram. The threats followed the publication in the magazine *Blueprint* of an article he wrote on the Islamist group's first suicide bomber.

On 13 March 2012, police and troops manhandled several journalists covering a visit to Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, by the first lady, Patience Jonathan. **Dare Fasuba**, of *The Vanguard*, **Akinwale Aboluade** of *The Punch*, **Gbenro Adesina** of *The News/PM NEWS*, and **Sola Adeyemo** of *Compass Newspapers* were prevented from entering Lekan Salami Stadium, while others such as **Bisi Oladele** of *The Nation* were beaten when they tried to exercise their right to cover the event.

On 11 March 2012, Boko Haram threatened to take action against three newspapers, *National Accord*, *Vanguard* and *Tribune*, in a tele-conference in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state. The group said the newspapers attributed statements to the group which were not made by its members and showed bias against it in their reports. It said they portrayed the group in a negative light while praising government forces.

On 9 March 2012, Boko Haram had threatened to "take care of" any journalist that misrepresented its views in an article. The *Nigerian Tribune* and *Vanguard Newspapers* were among those mentioned specifically by the group's spokesman, Abul Qaqa.

On 13 February 2012, six journalists from the *New Nigerian*, *Blueprint*, *Aminiya*, *Voice of Nigeria*, *Hausa Service* and the *Nigerian Standard*, and a *Nigerian Television Authority* cameraman were attacked by a dozen unidentified assailants in Katami village in the Silame local government area of Sokoto State, where they were covering the election campaign of the All Nigeria Peoples Party's candidate for the state governorship, Alhaji Yusha'u Ahmed. The bus in which they were travelling was attacked by men armed with machetes, knives, cutlasses and sticks.

On 7 February 2012, **Akinola Ariyo**, a photojournalist for the *New Nigerian*, was threatened by an officer who aimed his weapon at him and ordered him to leave while he was accompanying a group of people trying to negotiate the reopening of the press centre at Murtala Mohammed airport in Lagos, closed by the airport authorities in early February.

On 1 February 2012, three security guards assaulted **Hassan Adebayo**, marketing executive with the Port Harcourt newspaper *Daily Trust* and **Sani Musa**, the driver of the company's distribution vehicle, as the pair were delivering copies of that day's edition to vendors in the area.

Murders

On 20 January 2012, at least 166 people were killed in a total of about 20 explosions at eight strategic locations in Kano, which included the police headquarters, an intelligence agency building, an immigration department building and the home of a senior police officer.

On that same day, **Enenche Godwin Akogwu**, 31, the Kano correspondent of *Channels TV*, was shot dead while trying to cover Boko Haram suicide bombings, which killed at least 185 people earlier that day. The journalist was interviewing victims outside the Farm central police station, which was a target of one of the attacks, when an unidentified gunman fired several shots at him. The group is suspected to have killed him to prevent him from filing his report.

On 19 January 2012, the body of radio reporter **Nansok Silas**, who worked for *Highland FM*, was found in a stream under a bridge on the Zaramagada-Rayfield road, 200 metres from a military checkpoint, in Jos, northeast of Abuja. Nothing of value was taken from him and colleagues suspect he was the victim of a targeted murder, but the cause of death and possible motive are still unknown. He had not received any threats. Reporters Without Borders has called on the authorities to carry out a thorough investigation and to do their utmost to shed light on his death, and to consider the possibility that it was linked to his work.

In October 2011, Boko Haram had claimed responsibility for the killing of **Zakariya Isa**, a reporter and cameraman for the state-owned *Nigeria Television Authority* (NTA), shot dead outside his home in Maiduguri on his way home after attending a mosque. The group accused Isa of spying on it on behalf of Nigerian security forces, an allegation dismissed by his colleagues and the intelligence service. Reporters Without Borders has called on the authorities to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into this fatal shooting and urges investigators not to rule out the possibility that Isa was killed in connection with his work as a journalist.

BOKO HARAM – Freedom of information predator

The Boko Haram Islamist militia, responsible for bombings and suicide attacks on, among others, the United Nations, churches and police stations, has also made the media a target. It was behind two car bomb attacks on newspaper offices in Abuja and Kaduna in April 2012.

Formed in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, the capital of the northeastern state of Borno, the group Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad ("People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad"), known as Boko Haram ("Western education is a sin"), preaches a rigorous and radical form of Islam. Its goal is the application of sharia throughout the country. It accuses the media of bias in its reporting of the group's conflict with the Nigerian government.

Its spokesman Abul Qaqa said: "We have repeatedly cautioned reporters and media houses to be professional and objective in their reports. This is a war between us and the government of Nigeria. Unfortunately, the media have not been objective and fair in their reports of the ongoing war; they chose to take sides."

Police and intelligence services versus journalists

The country's State Security Service (SSS), which was on the Reporters Without Borders worldwide list of predators of press freedom for several years until being taken off it in 2010, is still a repressive body, which targets and arrests journalists.

Political parties and governors also threaten media freedom

Political parties and state governors also threaten and harass the media. Journalists who criticise the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) are sometimes prevented from reporting on political activities. **Ehigimotor Igbaugba**, of *The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)*, was unable to cover the senate primary elections in Auchi (in the southern state of Edo) on 8 January 2011 after being detained by PDP officials who criticised articles he had written about the party.

Intimidation of accredited journalists sharply increased when polling stations opened on 9 April 2011 for the parliamentary elections. *African Independent Television* cameraman **Tamunoemi Kingdom** and another crew member were beaten in Ozoro (Delta state) by PDP officials who objected to the filming of them harassing a man entering a polling station. The camera and the windscreen of the journalists' vehicle was damaged. **Aisha Wakaso**, of *Thisday Newspapers*, and **Afeyinwa Okonkwo**, correspondent of *NAN* in Enugu state, were hounded by police who prevented them reporting on the voting.

Recommendations:

Reporters Without Borders reiterates its recommendations made during UPR's 4th session in 2009, and calls upon Nigeria's authorities and judiciary to:

- - Carry out a thorough investigation and do their utmost to shed light on **Nansok Silas** and **Zakariya Isa**'s deaths, and consider the possibility that it was linked to their work as journalists.
- - Adopt concrete measures to ensure that journalists are protected and to reinforce security around news media buildings and offices
- - Put an end to constant harassment on journalists carried out by Nigerian officials.