

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/cameroon-are-douala-s-judges-colluding-with-13-06-2013,44778.html>

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Africa - Cameroon

Arbitrary charges

## Are Douala's judges colluding with local big shots to silence journalists?

13 June 2013

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Reporters Without Borders is alarmed by journalist and cartoonist **Charles Fils Elangue's** detention for the past six days in the business capital of Douala pending payment of a fine, damages and legal costs in a defamation case heard before a court in the Douala district of Ndokoti.

The court ordered Elangue's detention on 7 June after ruling that he must pay 2 million CFA francs (3,000 euros) in damages, a fine of 500,000 CFA francs (760 euros) and court costs of 156,000 CFA francs (240 euros) in a lawsuit brought by the wife of the musician Njohreur.

"A disturbing trend can be seen in the way media cases are handled in Douala," Reporters Without Borders said. "Plaintiffs, often influential local figures with an increasing readiness to sue, seem to be benefitting from the complicity of judges, who rule in their favour even when there is no evidence against the defendant."

"This local microcosm seems bent on deterring journalists from doing their job to report the news and investigate corruption. We condemn the Ndokoti court's regrettable decision and call for Elangue's immediate release. After a brief respite, the jailing of journalists in defamation cases seems to have resumed in Cameroon."

Elangue, who works for various media including *ABK* television, was found guilty of defamation and "spreading false news through the press" in a 2012 article for the *Kawali* website. As soon as the court issued the detention order, he was taken to Douala's New-Bell prison.

A drawn-out defamation case ended on 25 March with **Jean-Marie Tchatchouang**, the publisher of the monthly *Paroles*, being sentenced to two months in prison and a fine of 500,000 CFA francs (760 euros). The judge also ordered him to pay 2.5 million CFA francs (3,800 euros) in damages and to suspend publishing. His monthly has nonetheless continued to appear.

He was found guilty of libelling Jean Ernest Ngallè Bibéhé, the CEO of the urban transport company Socatur, in a series of articles in November and December 2010 about alleged corruption within the company. Tchatchouang was released on 24 May after completing the jail sentence and a court was due to begin hearing his appeal today.

Tchatchouang already received a six-month suspended prison sentence in 2011 in connection with the same libel action. So the courts have convicted him twice on the same charge, albeit for a different article.

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