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Africa - Côte d'Ivoire

Gap in the media

All pro-opposition newspapers suspended for six days

14 September 2012

Reporters Without Borders is concerned about an order issued two days ago by the National Press Council (CNP), the print media regulator, suspending the publication of all opposition newspapers that support the Ivorian Popular Front of the former president, Laurent Gbagbo, for six days.

"This mass suspension is a cause for concern since it deprives some of the Ivorian people of a source of news, even if it is biased like most of the print media in Côte d'Ivoire," the press freedom organization said.

"The decision is a major setback for press freedom in Côte d'Ivoire. The penalty is clearly disproportionate in relation to the offences of which the newspapers are accused," it added, expressing fears of further provocations.

Most of the newspapers were suspended for publishing photographs on their back pages of Gbagbo and his close advisers, with captions giving the ministerial posts they held during the post-electoral crisis between December 2010 and April 2011, during which 3,000 people were killed.

The captions refer to the government appointed by Gbagbo a week after the disputed second round of the presidential election, on 28 November 2010. His rival Alassane Ouattara, issued a decree when he took office in May 2011 declaring null and void all directives issued by Gbagbo between December 2010 and 2011. Yet some newspapers continue to describe officials who were part of Gbagbo's last government as "prime minister" or "minister".

The six newspapers, *Le Nouveau Courrier*, *LG Info*, *Le Temps*, *Aujourd'hui*, *Le quotidien d'Abidjan*, and *l'Alternative*, published the photos and captions as a gesture of support for *Notre Voie*, which did so previously and was suspended from publication on 6 September.

The CNP says identifying the officials in this way gives the impression that there are two governments in Côte d'Ivoire, arguing that such a practice could prolong the post-electoral crisis.

Reporters Without Borders calls on the CNP and its chairman, Raphael Lakpé, to show restraint. Journalists may no longer face the threat of imprisonment but they still have to cope with one-sided publication bans imposed by the CNP.

Photo: An Ivorian casts an eye over some of the country's largely partisan and often virulent newspapers.

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