

Reporters Without Borders

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Africa - Côte d'Ivoire

Challenges need addressing

With mixed record on freedom of information, President Ouattara visits Paris

25 July 2012

On the eve of the first meeting between Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara and French President François Hollande in Paris, Reporters Without Borders urges Côte d'Ivoire's government to press ahead with its efforts to improve media freedom, including measures to encourage the emergence of privately-owned broadcast media.

"The Côte d'Ivoire media environment has gradually improved in the 16 months since Ouattara became president in chaotic circumstances, at a time when the media were unable to function properly," Reporters Without Borders said. "But major challenges still need addressing. They include ending the detention of journalists, guaranteeing their freedom, promoting reconciliation within the media and opening up broadcasting to the private sector.

"We urge Hollande not to evade the issue of freedom of information, which is essential to improving the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, and we hope that his talks with Ouattara will be frank and will regard no subject as off-limits. It would be incomprehensible if Hollande fails to raise the issue of **Guy-André Kieffer**, a French journalist who was kidnapped in Abidjan eight years ago. The investigation has made little progress since the change of government."

Improving climate but challenges yet to be addressed

Within the print media, the so-called "blue" newspapers – those that supported former President Laurent Gbagbo, such as *Notre Voie*, *Le Temps* and *Le Nouveau Courrier* – are nowadays free to express their opinions without major problems. The emergence of new publications, both pro-government and pro-opposition ones, is expected in the coming weeks.

President Ouattara issued a decree on 23 May naming the journalist **Raphael Oré Lakpé** as president of the National Press Council (CNP), a body that regulates the print media.

The thorny issue of *Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI)* remains. The government of the day has always used this state-owned radio and TV broadcaster as a propaganda tool. Its ability to influence public opinion is enhanced by its near monopoly. *RTI 1* and *RTI 2* are the country's only two national TV stations.

The new government wants to introduce commercial broadcasting in order to promote diversity. The task has been assigned to former communication minister Ibrahim Sy Savané, who heads the newly-created High Authority for Broadcasting Communication (HACA). A commission with the job of organizing invitations to bid for radio and TV frequencies was sworn in on 20 July at the communication ministry. The creation of the first privately-owned TV stations is expected by the end of the year.

Difficult first year, several journalists arrested

However, Ouattara's first year in power, 2011, will be remembered for *RTI* journalist **Hermann Aboa**'s detention for five months. It was especially strange and unjust because Côte d'Ivoire's 2004 media law protects journalists from imprisonment. The former host of the *RTI* programme "Reasons of State," Aboa still faces several charges but is currently on conditional release.

César Etou, the editor of the daily *Notre Voie*, and two of his journalists, **Didier Dépry** and

Boga Sivori, spent 13 days in detention at the end of 2011, shortly before parliamentary elections. Prior to their arrest, their newspaper was occupied for months by the pro-Ouattara Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI).

In an address to the media at the end of January 2012, the president was very open and reaffirmed his determination to respect freedom of information. But a few days later, **Charles Sanga**, the editor of the daily *Le Patriote*, spent 24 hours at the Directorate for Territorial Surveillance (DST), an intelligence agency, being interrogated and pressured to reveal his sources for a story.

Recent incidents, recurring problems

Ousmane Sy Savané, the head of Cyclone, a company that publishes the opposition newspapers *Le Temps* and *Lg Infos* and the arts and culture review *Prestige Magazine*, was arrested by the DST on 27 March and has been held ever since in Abidjan's main prison, the MACA, on a charge of endangering state security.

The authorities have yet to produce hard evidence of any involvement by Savané in activities aimed at destabilizing the country and everything suggests that he is being held because of his close association with Nady Bamba, Cyclone's former sponsor and former President Gbagbo's second wife. If this is the case, he must be released.

Soukalo Coulibaly, a lawyer who represents Ouattara's party, the Rally of the Republicans (RDR), stormed into the offices of the news website *Koaci.com* accompanied by four gunmen on 19 July and arrested the journalist **Souleymane Koné** for allegedly defaming him in an article about problems at the Abidjan Collective Taxi Insurance Company (MATCA).

Koné was dragged off to the gendarmerie security department in the Abidjan district of Plateau, where he was handcuffed to a steel bar from 7 to 11 p.m. and pressured to reveal the source of his information. He was then taken to the headquarters of the criminal police and obliged to make a statement on the defamation charge before being released and allowed to go home in the early hours of the morning.

Current status of the Kieffer investigation

A Reporters Without Borders representative and Osange Silou-Kieffer, the wife of missing Franco-Canadian journalist Guy-André Kieffer, urged the country's most senior officials to confirm their desire to shed light on his disappearance when they travelled together to Abidjan in April on the eighth anniversary of his abduction in Abidjan.

In particular, they requested the appointment of a special commission of enquiry or a special unit to work with Patrick Ramaël, the French investigative judge handling the French investigation; reactivation of the "follow-up committee" created in 2004; and renewed interrogation of all those believed to be linked to Kieffer's abduction, with these interrogations to be conducted in a determined manner until the mystery of Kieffer's disappearance is solved. [More information](#)

In response to these requests, the authorities appointed an Abidjan-Plateau district judge, Geneviève Nogo Zie-Kuibert, to pursue the investigation.

Photo : Alassane Ouattara during a previous visit, in January 2012 (AFP/Thibault CAMUS)

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