

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/support-for-press-freedom-day-17-05-2013,44629.html>

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- Helping journalists

3 May 2013

## Support for Press Freedom Day debates in North Kivu

17 May 2013

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Reporters Without Borders provided funding for two round-table meetings that local journalists' groups organized for media personnel in the cities of Butembo and Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo's eastern province of Nord-Kivu, on 3 May, World Press Freedom Day.

The subject for debate at the meetings was "Speaking without fear and guaranteeing press freedom in all the media." The meetings also provided an opportunity for dialogue with the authorities, who were invited to attend.

"We are proud to have supported journalists in Butembo and Goma," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said. "We hail the vitality and commitment of the Nord-Kivu journalistic community and we take note of the active participation by regional officials in these debates.

"Given the complexity of the environment for the media in the eastern DRC, we fervently hope that these World Press Freedom Day meetings will have helped to establish the bases for a constructive dialogue that will enable all of Nord-Kivu's journalists to work freely and safely."

Recent months have been particularly difficult for the media in the eastern DRC. Caught in the crossfire between government troops and militias fighting for control of the Kivu region, local media and journalists have been constantly hounded during the past six months. The many violations of freedom of information in Nord-Kivu have included the illegal suspension of broadcasting by radio stations in Goma in November, the ransacking of media offices, and other forms of harassment by M23 rebels, as well as arbitrary arrests of journalists by both government forces and militias.

More than 100 journalists took part in the round-table organized in Butembo. The local officials attending included the city's mayor, who delivered the opening address.

A painting specially done for the event was signed by the mayor and representatives of eight Butembo journalists' organizations as a symbol of the debates and the mutual undertakings by local authorities and media. On behalf the authorities, the mayor undertook to respect media rights and freedoms, while the journalists reaffirmed their commitment to media ethics and professional conduct. The mayor reportedly plans to name one of the city's streets as "Media Freedom Street" by the end of May.

The discussions focussed on the situation of the media in Nord-Kivu, the consequences for the media of the fighting between rebels and government forces, and the situation of women journalists. Widely covered by the local media, the event ended with a consensus among the various local journalists' organizations, one that could pave the way for the creation of a single platform capable of voicing the concerns and demands of Butembo's journalists.

### **Support in Goma for detained journalist**

Representatives of the National Union of the Congolese Press of Nord-Kivu were among the journalists participating in the event in Goma, which local government officials also attended.

The discussions focussed above all on security issues, respect for journalists' rights, and media

ethics, with frequent reference being made to the reports on freedom of information in the DRC published by Reporters Without Borders and its partner organization, Journalist in Danger.

[The case of Blaise Bahisha, a journalist detained by the Nord-Kivu military court since 17 April](#), was debated at length, in part because it is a good illustration of the kind of problem the media have to endure in the eastern DRC.

All the journalists attending the meeting expressed their support for Bahisha and called for his release. The military prosecutor in charge of his case, who also attended the meeting, said he was awaiting instructions from Kinshasa on how to proceed with the case.



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