

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/rd-congo-street-renamed-media-freedom-18-06-2013,44629.html>

Africa - DRC

On the right track

Street renamed "Media Freedom Street" by city's mayor

18 June 2013

Reporters Without Borders hails last weekend's decision by the mayor of Butembo, a city in the troubled eastern province of Nord-Kivu, to rename one of the city's streets "Media Freedom Street."

"We welcome this gesture by Butembo's mayor," Reporters Without Borders said. "It is an unusual initiative in a country and even more so in a region – Nord-Kivu – where the security situation for journalists is very fragile and media freedom is often flouted."

"Apparently intended to encourage news providers and human rights activists, this measure speaks to the ability of local authorities and media representatives to establish a dialogue and understand each other. Aside from its strong symbolism, we hope it will have a concrete impact on the daily work of journalists and will help pave the way for a better tomorrow for media freedom and freedom of information."

In a 15 June municipal decree, Mayor Théodore Sikuly Uvasaka Makala said: "Media growth is encouraging in the city of Butembo, with 11 local radio stations, TV stations and a trainee newspaper for a population of about 1 million, without counting those in the areas around the city, who all benefit from this media enthusiasm."

He added: "Butembo is one of the few cities where the media, political and administrative authorities, religious authorities and public work closely together to establish democracy (...) the local media have helped and continue to help educate the local population in all domains and we should recognize their efforts."

Supported by Reporters Without Borders, the request for a "Media Freedom Street" was submitted by the city's journalists during a round-table organized in Butembo on 3 May 2013, World Press freedom day.

17.05.2013 - Support for Press Freedom Day debates in North Kivu

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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