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<http://www.rsf.org/drc-questionable-decrees-25-08-2014,46843.html>

Africa - DRC

Information ministry bans 61 newspapers

Questionable decrees

25 August 2014

Another 75 are declared defunct for failing to publish regularly

Reporters Without Borders calls on the information ministry to rescind two new decrees, one on 18 August declaring 75 newspapers defunct for failing to publish for the past three years, and one on 20 August banning 61 other newspapers on the grounds that they have no legal existence.

Signed by information minister Lambert Mende Omalanga, the decrees are being fiercely criticized by the Democratic Republic of Congo's media community.

Citing article 16 of the 1996 press law, the first decree declares that 75 newspapers have ceased to exist because they have not brought out any issue for three years. The second decree, citing article 22 of the same law, declares that 61 newspapers "have no [legal] title allowing them to operate in the Democratic Republic of Congo and therefore do not exist as press organs."

Reached by Reporters Without Borders, the owners of several publications named in the decrees insisted that they did not meet the criteria for being banned, either because they have continued to publish issues during the past three years, or because they have a receipt showing that they are duly registered.

It should nonetheless be acknowledged that some of the newspapers named in the 18 August decree have ceased to publish altogether or appear only sporadically and usually in the form of – often very politicized – pamphlets rather than real newspapers.

"We prefer to regard this as an information ministry gaffe rather than a censorship attempt," said Reporters Without Borders. "Nonetheless, it is important that the Congolese authorities should not use bureaucratic pretexts to harass the media, as they are doing here.

"It is also questionable whether the ministry has the power to ban newspapers. This should be a matter for the regulatory authorities or, if appropriate, the courts. We call on the ministry to rescind these decrees at once and to allow the newspapers to continue publishing."

In response to the [outcry from the media community](#), including the NGO Journalist in Danger, the information ministry has given the named publications 45 days to comply or to produce the required documents. However, the deadline extension only concerns those that owe back taxes or have not published for three years.

Under the 1996 press law, newspapers must register but do not need a permit to publish. The DRC has several hundred publications, some of which appear very occasionally, and do not meet the criteria expected of a newspaper.

The DRC is ranked 151st out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).
