

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/rd-congo-censorship-reigns-in-nord-kivu-24-05-2013,44668.html>

Africa - DRC

Controlled journalists

Censorship reigns in Nord-Kivu areas under M23 rebel control

24 May 2013

Fighting between M23 rebels and government forces has intensified near Goma, the capital of the eastern province of Nord-Kivu, since 20 May. As well as causing new civilian casualties, the clashes and the actions of some rebels are endangering many journalists and the availability of diverse, freely-reported news and information.

Reporters Without Borders has conducted a series of interviews with Nord-Kivu journalists and has spoken by phone with two M23 officials, Bertrand Bisimwa, the rebel movement's political leader, and René Abandi, who is in charge of its external affairs.

"We deplore the civilian losses and destruction resulting from the resumption of hostilities and we are particularly worried about journalists, who are being prevented from working freely," Reporters Without Borders said.

"In territory controlled by the M23, the media are subject to threats, censorship, control of their editorial policies, occupation and sometimes abduction of their personnel. Journalism is threatened with extinction in this region of the Democratic Republic of Congo."

After abusive M23 behaviour towards the media began being reported in 2012, Reporters Without Borders asked the movement's leaders to guarantee journalists the right to work without being exposed to threats and, in response, they did undertake to guarantee media freedom.

Reporters Without Borders has reiterated this request by phone with Bisimwa and Abandi.

"You cannot refuse without risking your life."

A radio editor told Reporters Without Borders: "M23 intelligence officers come to the office every evening and read all the stories. They are the ones who decide which stories we can broadcast and which ones we have to spike. You cannot refuse without risking your life."

When questioned about this, Abandi replied: "This is a big lie. We are the victims of false testimony. This country's government is very good at organizing smear campaigns against us."

Referring to Bisimwa, he added: "Our movement is led by a former journalist, spokesman and press attaché. I can guarantee to you that we want free media, that we want our critics to be able to express themselves."

A radio journalist who fled to Kinshasa after being threatened in Nord-Kivu said a pro-rebel local official publicly told him: "You think that burning down your little radio station might give us a problem? We will see whether the Kabila government you are trying to defend comes to your rescue."

Intimidation, self-censorship and reduced information

Several radio stations such as *Azur Radio TV* and *Radio Colombe* in Kiwanja have closed or have stopped broadcasting certain kinds of news, and have had to temporarily lay off journalists. In areas where these radio stations are the only news outlets, the information available to the public has been reduced to the minimum.

Radio Okapi, the UN-created radio that has its headquarters in Kinshasa, is the only station still able to operate properly.

The situation of independent radio and TV stations and newspapers in Nord-Kivu has worsened alarmingly as a result of M23's use of intimidation to get them to carry its propaganda. Reporters Without Borders has been reporting flagrant [media freedom violations](#) ever since the rebel movement gained in strength.

Internal exile and threats

At least 10 journalists, probably more, have abandoned their news media and fled the region where they worked in order to escape rebel harassment. Reporters Without Borders is very worried by this internal exile phenomenon. They flee to Goma or to other parts of the country including Kinshasa. Those that stay live in fear of a visit by M23 representatives.

As well as being out of work and forced to live far from their families, these journalists are spied on and placed under surveillance by the Congolese government's intelligence services, which suspect them of being M23 accomplices. So even in exile, they have to go into hiding.

One of the worst cases is that of *Radio Sauti ya Rutchuru* manager [Blaise Bahisha](#), who has been held for the past five weeks in Goma on suspicion of being an M23 supporter and spy. Reporters Without Borders is assisting him.

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