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Africa - Nigeria

Newspaper seizures

Army seizes newspaper issues day after day on "security" grounds

11 June 2014

Reporters Without Borders condemns the army's many seizures of newspapers, throughout Nigeria and urges the authorities to respect the public's right to information.

Soldiers have seized many newspapers, including the *Leadership*, *The Nation* and *Daily Trust*, since 6 June, and have threatened and sometimes detained distribution personnel during the confiscations.

Army spokesman Chris Olukolade described the seizures as a "routine security action" following "intelligence reports indicating movement of materials with grave security implications across the country using the channel of newsprint-related consignments." The army wanted to ensure that no material threatening the security of Nigerians was being transported in newspaper distribution trucks, he explained.

The confiscations began early on 6 June when members of the security services and armed forces moved in on distributors and sellers in Nigeria's main distribution points – Abuja, Kaduna, Kano, Jos, Maiduguri and Ibadan – seizing copies of *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *Leadership* and other newspapers. Copies were also seized at Lagos international airport and in the Port Harcourt region.

The *Leadership*, one of the newspapers most targeted by the seizures, reported on 3 June that ten army generals and five non-commissioned officers had been tried and convicted by court martial of complicity with the terrorist group Boko Haram. The military denied this the next day, accusing the newspaper of trying to sully the image of the army and its troops. The Nigerian media have often criticized the army's inability to deal with Boko Haram.

"We call on the Nigerian military to put a stop to such practices," Reporters Without Borders said. "If the army had really feared that weapons were being transported in newspaper trucks, why did confiscate all these newspapers? These actions obstruct the Nigerian public's right to information. The army must accept criticism in the media without preventing their circulation."

Despite condemnation by many news media and international organizations on 6 June, the army continued to confiscate newspapers such as *Leadership Weekend*, *The Guardian on Saturday*, *ThisDay*, *Weekend Trust*, *Sun*, *Pilot*, *NewsWatch*, *The Mirror* and *Saturday Punch* throughout the weekend.

Personnel in charge of the *Leadership's* distribution were arrested in the north of the country on the morning of 7 June and were held until the afternoon. One of the newspaper's editors said "no reason" was given by the soldiers. "I learned they flipped through the pages to be sure that there is no major stories on Boko Haram. They have no justification for this (...) They just want to cripple the newspapers in the country."

Soldiers also stormed distribution centres in the northern town of Gariki on 7 June, threatening distributors and sellers and preventing newspaper vans from being unloaded, while *The Nation's* distribution vans were intercepted in the southwest and copies of the newspaper were seized before they could be distributed.

Soldiers intercepted vans carrying *The Nation's* Sunday edition in the central city of Jos on 8 June while, in the central city of Minna, a witness said ten soldiers went into a distribution centre at around 7 a.m. and examined all the newspaper issues very closely. After a detailed inspection, they allowed distribution of the *Vanguard*, *Tribune*, *Sun*, *Union*, *ThisDay*, *Guardian* and *Sunday NewsWatch* but didn't allow the distribution of *The Nation*, *Leadership* and *Daily*

Trust newspapers. The soldiers remained until the mid-afternoon to ensure that these three newspapers were not distributed.

Distribution of the same three newspapers was reportedly prevented in a similar incident in the southern city of Benin.

On 9 June, for the fourth day running, the armed forces obstructed the circulation of newspapers, especially in Lagos and Ibadan. *The Nation*, *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* were again among the newspapers that were most targeted.

A Nigerian military officer said this "routine operation" would continue until the armed forces had decided that the security situation was satisfactory.

Nigeria is ranked 112th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

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