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<http://www.rsf.org/tchad-media-law-revision-would-sound-23-11-2012,43715.html>

Africa - Chad

Backward-looking bill

Media law revision would sound death knell for independent press

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Reporters Without Borders believes a proposed revision of Chad's media law, which has been under discussion in N'Djamena since last month, could mean the death of the independent press in Chad.

The press freedom organization, which has obtained a pre-publication copy, is deeply concerned about this repressive piece of legislation, which was drafted after a process solely lacking in transparency, and believes it would be a death sentence for independent journalism. RWB urges President Idriss Déby to do his utmost to ensure it is not passed into law.

"On the pretext of cleaning up the media and making journalists more accountable, those who drafted this bill have introduced harsh measures that would stifle the independent press," it said. "It is impossible not to view this as a tactic on the part of those in the government to emasculate the press and prevent it from causing any more problems in the future.

"The authorities' hidden agenda is to engineer the closure of several titles such as the opposition newspaper *Ndjaména Bi-hebdo* and the bi-monthly *Abba Garde*, Chad's newest newspaper and the most widely-read in N'Djamena."

The draft revision of the media law 017/PR/2010 was drawn up on the quiet at the government's instigation. Several local sources told Reporters Without Borders, the architects of the reform were probably the prime minister and the communication and justice ministers, as well as the minister and secretary general of the government.

Section 9 of the draft states that every journalist is required to possess a master's diploma from a school of journalism, or a university degree plus vocational training at a state-approved school of journalism.

Reporters Without Borders sees this narrow definition of the status of a professional journalist as a covert attempt by the authorities to exclude key figures in several influential local newspapers such as *Ndjaména Bi-hebdo*, *Notre Temps* and *Le Potentiel*.

Under Article 17, the printers must have their head office inside Chad. This measure is aimed at N'Djamena-based newspapers that, for financial reasons, are printed in towns in northern Cameroun. This applies to *Abba Garde*, for example, which prints in Garoua.

Article 19 of the draft requires that two copies of each edition must be lodged with the public prosecutor's office, two with the High Council for Communication and two with the national archives on the eve of publication. This new provision could lead to prior censorship.

It provides for much harsher penalties and any thought of decriminalising press offences has been abandoned. On the contrary, the draft provides for prison sentences for journalists of between five months and 10 years, higher fines, the extension of temporary closures from three months to a year and the possible imposition by a court of an indefinite publication ban.

Reporters Without Borders notes that *Ndjaména Bi-hebdo* is currently serving a three-month publication ban. The management has appealed against the ruling and, although it should not be carried out pending the appeal, the authorities have prevented the newspaper from being

published. A number of copies of the paper were recently seized.

Section 7, which covers incitement to commit crimes or offences, and section 8 covering crimes against persons, have been toughened and the definition of "insult" has been broadened. The list of individuals and institutions that come under its protection has been extended and an offence of insulting the country's president has been introduced, under article 68.

Reporters Without Borders concluded: "If this bill is approved, it would set press freedom in Chad back 40 years. It would no longer be possible to report the news or to carry out journalism as it is practised in the country today."

Download the proposed revision of Chad's media law (in french):



**Projet de loi
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Photo : President Idriss Deby (Mahmud Turkia / AFP)

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