

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/cote-d-ivoire-amid-continuing-political-deadlock-01-03-2011,39652.html>

Africa - Côte d'Ivoire

Publishing again

Nine newspapers resume publishing after week-long protest against harassment

8 March 2011

Nine privately-owned newspapers – *Le Patriote*, *Le Mandat*, *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan*, *Le Démocrate*, *L'Expression*, *Le Jour Plus*, *Nord-Sud*, *Le Nouveau Réveil* and *Le Repère* – resumed publishing yesterday, a week after suspending publication temporarily in a joint protest against threats and harassment by officials allied to Laurent Gbagbo.

The climate for the media nonetheless continues to be poisonous in Côte d'Ivoire, as evidenced by a rocket-propelled grenade attack on the headquarters of the *Fraternité Matin* daily on the evening of 5 March. It caused no damage.

Local retransmission of *France 24* is still suspended, while retransmission of the *BBC* and *RFI* has been suspended since the start of March. and [two *Télé Notre Patrie* journalists who were arrested on 28 January are still being held in Abidjan's main prison.](#)

01-03-2011- Amid continuing political deadlock, nine newspapers suspend publishing and RTI transmitter attacked

Nine privately-owned newspapers suspended publication today until further notice in protest against threats and harassment by officials who support Laurent Gbagbo. The move came two days after the main transmission centre of *Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI)*, the state-owned broadcaster controlled by the Gbagbo camp, was attacked by supporters of Gbagbo's rival Alassane Ouattara during clashes in the Abidjan district of Abobo.

At the same time, a printing press employee of La Refondation, the company that publishes the daily *Notre Voie*, was beaten and hacked to death yesterday in the south Abidjan suburb of Koumassi. *Notre Voie* supports Gbagbo's party, the Ivorian Popular Front (FPL).

"Our concern for press freedom in Côte d'Ivoire is mounting by the day," Reporters Without Borders said. "We offer our support to the privately-owned newspapers that are being hounded and threatened and have decided to denounce a situation that has become impossible for the press."

The organization added: "We fear that the repressive measures adopted by the National Press Council and the media war being waged between Gbagbo and Ouattara will result in the already very polarized media becoming even more radicalized."

New version of National Press Council moves into action

In a [communiqué read out on RTI on 25 February](#), the National Press Council (CNP) announced the suspension of the pro-Ouattara daily *Le Nouveau Réveil* for one week (six issues). Three other pro-Ouattara dailies, *Le Patriote*, *Nord-Sud* and *Le Jour Plus*, were fined between 1 and 2 million CFA francs (1,500 to 3,000 euros).

The authorities accuse these newspapers of publishing “unbearable and shocking images” and comments “defending violence” and “revolt” in their coverage of clashes between pro-Ouattara and pro-Gbagbo demonstrators in Abidjan.

In a statement sent to Reporters Without Borders, *Le Nouveau Réveil* director-general Denis Kah Zion said his newspaper had decided to accept its suspension only “to preserve the lives of its employees.”

The CNP's governing body was fired and replaced at the start of February by Gbagbo supporters. [Reporters Without Borders condemned the move at the time as “an arbitrary and politically-motivated move \(...\) liable to set Côte d’Ivoire back 20 years in terms of respect for media freedom.”](#)

“Laurent Gbagbo’s government has just taken over the CNP, a regulatory body known for being serious and impartial,” Reporters Without Borders said in a release at the time. “Given the political affiliation of the people co-opted by the Gbagbo camp to replace its leadership, we fear the CNP will cease to perform its regulatory function and will henceforth be used to punish opposition journalists and media harshly, and to protect media that are loyal to Gbagbo.”

Resistance by pro-Ouattara and independent media

The group of newspapers that suspended publication today in protest at the “unacceptable harassment” consisted of eight opposition publications – *Le Nouveau Réveil*, *L’Expression*, *Le Patriote*, *Le Jour Plus*, *Le Mandat*, *Le Démocrate* and *Nord-Sud* – and one independent one, *L’Intelligent d’Abidjan*.

All belong to an alliance called the “Newspaper Collective for Safeguarding the Gains of 28 November 2010,” which issued a joint statement “vigorously rejecting the CNP’s illegal decisions” and “noting with great concern the continuation of judicial and police harassment by means of repeated summonses to journalists to report to the criminal investigation department.”

The Collective also deplored the disappearance of **Ouattara Yacouba**, a driver for the daily *Nord-Sud*, who was kidnapped and has not been seen since.

RTI transmitter attacked, pro-Gbagbo newspapers torn up

Shots were fired at *RTI*'s main transmission centre, located in the Abidjan neighbourhood of Abobo, during clashes between pro-Gbagbo security forces and Ouattara supporters on the night of 26 February, resulting in the interruption of *RTI*'s over-the-air signal in the capital.

“Although this broadcaster is currently an all-out propaganda mouthpiece for the Gbagbo camp, this kind of incident will not help to defuse tension,” Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Jean-François Julliard said. “Regardless of the context, we condemn armed attacks on news media and transmitters.”

Today, members of the Houphouëtiste Rally for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) attacked news kiosks and newspaper vendors, tearing up copies of pro-Gbagbo newspapers, which are continuing to publish. Threats were also made against Edipresse, a company that distributes newspapers.

Photo : AFP
