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<http://www.rsf.org/terrorism-claims-used-to-silence-17-11-2014,47233.html>

Censorship

## Terrorism claims used to silence radio stations in Nord-Kivu

17 November 2014

Reporters Without Borders condemns the government's announced closure of five opposition radio stations in the Beni region of the eastern province of Nord-Kivu in a communiqué marked by irregularities. This type of measures makes it easier for the intelligence services to move against local media.

Information minister Lambert Mendé announced the closures of the stations and the withdrawal of their licences in a communiqué broadcast by *Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise (RTNC)* on 14 November. The stations are located in a region that is 400 km north of Goma, the provincial capital.

The communiqué accused the five stations – *RTGB (Radio Télévision Graben Beni)*, *Radio Liberté Beni (RALIB)*, *Radio Télévision Rwanzururu (RTR)*, *Radio Ngoma FM* and *Radio Furu* – of supporting terrorism and conniving with the ADF/NALU rebels.

Owned by people affiliated with the opposition, all five stations are used to reporting the views of both ruling party members and members of the opposition.

"Coming from one of the highest government levels, these closure orders display a disturbing degree of irregularity in both substance and procedure," said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

"It is hard not to see this as a political attempt to gag opposition radio stations. We call on the information ministry to rescind these orders, which obstruct the Congolese public's right to pluralist news and information."

The orders violated procedure because, according to the law, it is not the information ministry's job to announce the closure of radio stations. Any media closure on the grounds of content must be the subject of a procedure involving the Higher Council for Broadcasting and Communication (CSAC), whose duties include regulating the media.

This established procedure gives the media concerned a right to respond to charges, which clearly did not happen in this case. The media must also be notified in writing, not by means of a communiqué read out over the air.

"We were never formally notified," *Radio Liberté Beni* director **Jina Ivoha** told Reporters Without Borders. "A government is supposed to use written documents. You cannot close a radio station by reading a communiqué. This is politics pure and simple. Our stations have been shut down simply because the government did not like us."

According to testimonies, the communiqué is being enforced on the ground through threats made by the mayor of Beni, Bwanakawa Nyonyi Jean Edmond, as well as ANR agents.

The communiqué read out on the air by *RTNC* was also inaccurate. It listed *Radio Ngoma FM* as one of the stations to be closed although it stopped broadcasting nearly six months ago for lack of funds, long before the resurgence in atrocities by the ADF/NALU rebels in the Beni region two months ago.

### Closure and confusion

The communiqué also mentioned a radio station that does not exist – "Radio Furu." There is a radio station in the Furu district of Butembo (a city 54 km north of Beni) that is called *Radio Espoir FM* but it has not stopped operating. One of its representatives, Léon Tsongo, said: "The information ministry closed 'Radio Furu' of Beni, not *Radio Espoir FM* of Butembo, so we think it does not concern us."

The National Intelligence Agency (ANR) has moved quickly to execute the closures albeit in a somewhat confused manner.

ANR officials arrived at *Radio Liberté Butembo* on 15 November with the intention of closing it

because they confused it with *Radio Liberté Beni*, which was named in the communiqué. They nonetheless returned to *Radio Liberté Butembo* this morning and this time they did cut short its broadcasts and confiscate equipment.

*Radio Liberté Butembo* manager **Ulrich Muyeye** said the government took issue with the fact that the station broadcast an opposition politician's comment on a speech by Nord-Kivu's governor on the massacres in the city of Beni.

Later in the day, after a mediation meeting, the material was returned to the radio which was allowed to broadcast again.

**Germaine Mwanza** and **El Katé Maganiryo**, two journalists with *Radio Graben Kasindi* (located 80 km from Beni, near the Ugandan border), were arrested by ANR officers on 14 November and were held for 48 hours in an ANR detention centre.

Shortly after their arrest, *Radio Graben Kasindi* was illegally closed, probably because officials confused it with *Radio Graben Beni*, one of the stations named in the communiqué. Although released, the two journalists have been forced to stay in Beni and have not been able to go back to work.

The ADF/NALU rebels have been held responsible for a number of shocking recent massacres in the Beni region in which, according to Nord-Kivu civil society sources, 120 people have died since 2 October.

[Security is often cited as grounds for gagging the media](#) in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is ranked 151st out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

(photo : Lambert Mendé, Information minister)

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