

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/car-dismay-over-editor-s-10-month-jail-27-01-2012,41779.html>

Africa - CAR

Decriminalization ignored

Dismay over editor's 10-month jail sentence

27 January 2012

Reporters Without Borders is appalled by the 10-month jail sentence that a Bangui court passed yesterday on **Ferdinand Samba**, the editor of the daily *Le Démocrate*, on a charge of libelling the finance minister, Lt. Col. Sylvain Ndoutingai, who is President Bozizé's nephew.

The court also ordered Samba to pay 10 million CFA francs (15,000 euros) in damages to Ndoutingai and a fine of 1 million CFA francs (1,500 euros), and banned *Le Démocrate* from publishing for one year.

"How is it possible that a journalist has been sentenced to a prison term in the Central African Republic, where the 2005 media law decriminalized media offences," Reporters Without Borders said, calling for Samba's immediate release.

"This sentence is incomprehensible. This is justice at the service of the most powerful, justice that is deaf to calls from journalists for fairer and more appropriate penalties. Such decisions cause serious harm to media freedom in this country. Not only has a journalist been jailed for what he wrote but the population has also been deprived of a newspaper for a year."

Samba was taken into custody on 16 January, four days after the court issued a warrant for his arrest in connection with a series of articles criticising the finance minister that were published in October, November and December. He has been held in Bangui's Ngaragba prison ever since.

In the trial that started on 19 January, he was charged with defaming and insulting the finance minister and "inciting hatred" against him.

No newspapers were published on 20 January by members of the Central African Association of Privately-Owned Newspaper Publishers (GEPPIC) in a protest against Samba's arrest. The association also appealed to the finance minister for a show of leniency.

Reporters Without Borders supports the leading independent media journalists who have been voicing solidarity with Samba for the past several days.

La Plume publisher **Patrick Agoundou**, who is currently out of the country, has meanwhile been sentenced in absentia to a year in prison. A warrant has been issued for his arrest.

More information about [media freedom in the Central African Republic](#).

The Central African Republic is ranked 62nd out of 179 countries in the 2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

Photo : Ferdinand Samba (Centrafrique Presse Info website)
