



numbers 31 & 32 – February / March 2005

IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE...

ZOOM

Equatorial Guinea: Print media threatened

1. DIARY

Kenya: Third pan-African AMARC conference from 18 - 22 April, 2005

International meeting of French-language radio stations

2. PRINT MEDIA NEWS

Cameroon: Diapason, a new newspaper

Cameroon: New director for national radio and television

DRC: *Le Potentiel* and *Le Palmarès* get bigger

3. TELEVISION AND RADIO NEWS

Cameroon: RTVL, a new television station

Chad: Radio DJA FM suspended

DRC: Phone-in programmes suspended

DRC: Reporters in the Great Lakes carry out joint assignments

4. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE MEDIA

Burundi: RPA suspends Net Press

Central Africa: High Communication Council set up

Equatorial Guinea: Government dismisses twenty media workers

Rwanda: HCP calls Umurage to order

Rwanda: HCP's monitoring protocol questioned

5. STRUCTURING AND PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE MEDIA

Gabon: Creation of a self-regulation body

Gabon: National order of professional journalists is born

DRC: OMEC publishes Code of conduct for journalists

DRC: National press strategy being drafted

DRC: Congolese journalists advocate code of practice days

ZOOM

Equatorial Guinea: Print media threatened

For the past three months, the government's monthly newsletter, *Ebano*, with a print run of 500 copies, has disappeared from the newsstands of the capital, Malabo. According to its editors, speaking on 7 January, the Ministry of Information stopped paying its 540,000 Fcfa (831 euros) subsidy "with no explanation." The newsletter, on sale at 300 Fcfa (0,47 euros), was once a familiar feature of bars and cafes.

Meanwhile, *Ebano's* sister publication, *Poto-poto*, which usually appears in the country's second largest town and financial centre, Bata, on the mainland, has only been coming out spasmodically.

El Tiempo and *la Opinion*, the two main independent newspapers, have also not been seen for several years because of financial difficulties. The only paper available is now the pro-government monthly, *Gaceta*, published in Spain with a print run of over one thousand.

The only foreign papers read in Malabo and Bata come from the French and Spanish cultural centres, or on international flights. When an international flight arrives at Malabo airport, Equatorial Guineans grab all the copies they can find of these complementary papers and then sell them for 1000 to 2000 Fcfa each (1.60 or 3.20 euros).

RAN / IPP

1. DIARY

Kenya: Third pan-African AMARC conference from 18 - 22 April, 2005

On 18 -21 April, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) will be holding its 3rd pan-African conference in Nairobi (Kenya). This is the first time it has been held in East Africa.

The theme for the meeting, *Local Content For The Sustainable Development of Community Radio in Africa*, should enable AMARC members to share and create strategic plans for improving the development of community radio. The meeting will also be the moment to elect a new Committee for AMARC-Africa.

Previous conferences were held in Johannesburg (South Africa) in 1999 and Dakar (Senegal) in 2001.

MPL / IPP

Contact:

For more information: <http://africa.amarc.org>

To download a registration form: <http://africa.amarc.org/files/formulaire.pdf>

International meeting of French-language radio stations

The next international meeting of French-language radio stations (RIRAF) will be held in Mons (Belgium) from 26 June to 2 July with the theme of "citizenship, civil society and radio".

RIRAF is a forum for discussion and exchange on the use of radio to tackle the preoccupations of civil society. It brings together stakeholders from francophone radio stations (both men and women) such as journalists, broadcasters, technicians and heads of stations. During the meeting, participants will draw up common strategies and suggest ways to cooperate.

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Press officer: Willy Colin, rsf@voilà.fr

Web Site: www.riraf.org (for downloadable registration forms and details on participation; closing date for registration: 25 February 2005)

2. PRINT MEDIA NEWS

Cameroon: Diapason, a new newspaper

Diapason, a new weekly paper, appeared on Cameroon's newsstands on 15 January. The paper's 12-pages come out in Yaounde, with an editorial line oriented towards employment, the economy and the financial world. Directed by François Mboke, the first issue featured articles on the counterfeit and illegal merchandise currently flooding the Cameroon market.

JW / IPP

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Cameroon: New director for national radio and television

Since January 26, Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) has had a new director, the journalist, Amadou Vamouké. He takes over from Prof. Gervais Mendo Ze, who, after 17 years in the post, has been appointed Minister responsible for Communication in the new government, formed on 8 December 2004.

After studying at the *Ecole supérieure internationale de journalisme de Yaoundé* (ESIJY) in the early 1970's, Mr Vamouké went on to work on the State daily, the *Cameroon Tribune*, becoming Editor-in-Chief in the early 1980s. He also directed the national printing enterprise. As head of CRTV, Mr Vamouké will have to find ways to compete with independent radio and TV stations.

JW / IPP

DRC: *Le Potentiel* and *Le Palmarès* get bigger

Two of Kinshasa's daily papers, *Le Potentiel* and *Le Palmarès*, have increased their size from 20 to 24 pages since the start of the year, the first papers to make such a move.

Le Potentiel was the first Congolese paper to go from 8 to 12 pages, then 16 pages and finally 20 pages before growing to 24 pages on 5 January. For over a year most of Kinshasa's dailies have stayed with 12 pages.

Although *Le Potentiel* has kept its tabloid format, it has been given a new design, while its articles are more in-depth and interviews are longer.

Le Potentiel, which started 20 years ago, is one of the country's leading papers, with an internet site, www.lepotentiel.com, that is one of the best maintained of any Congolese paper, alongside that of *L'Avenir*.

The increased size for *Le Potentiel* has also meant an increase in price, from 300 Fcfa (0.48 euro) to 450 Fcfa, (0.71) euro, which could limit sales.

FB / IPP

3. TELEVISION AND RADIO NEWS

Cameroon: RTVL, a new television station

Since 15 January, residents of Yaoundé and surrounding areas have been able to receive television broadcasts from *Radio télévision lumière* (RTVL) between 4 pm and 11 pm. At

present, RTVL mainly broadcasts entertainment and music programmes but, according to Joseph Ndi Samba, instigator of RTVL, the channel aims to concentrate more on education in the near future. RTVL is one of ten other independent television channels currently broadcasting in Cameroon.

JW / IPP

Chad: Radio DJA FM suspended

On 17 January, Chad's regulatory body, the High Communication Council (HCC), decided to suspend the non-profit radio station *DJA Fm* (96.9 Fm) for one week, and indefinitely if it did not pay its annual license fee.

Mrs Zara Yacoub, Director of the station and President of the Chad Union of Private Radio (URPT), only learned of the HCC decision through an official communiqué that appeared a few days after it came into force. "Radio DJA FM broadcasts are suspended for 8 days from Monday 17 January to Monday 24 January inclusive, for non-settlement of sums owing, in conformity with the terms of reference for independent radio stations" says the communiqué. According to Mrs Yacoub, the annual license fee being claimed by the HCC is 500 000 Fcfa (765 euros). In a communiqué of 16 January, Mrs Yacoub explained that "the non-payment of the license fee is not in any way a refusal to conform to the law, but simply due to a dire lack of funds". She goes on to point out that "DJA FM had promised to pay the license fee as soon as it received the government grant accorded to independent radio stations". This is the first time HCC has suspended a radio station for non-payment of the license fee since it was set up in 1995. Mrs Yacoub claims it is "a determined effort by HCC to shut down DJA FM for reasons it has not admitted".

MPL / IPP

DRC: Phone-in programmes suspended

In a "circular" dated 18 January 2005, the Minister of Information and Press has decided to suspend all live phone-in programmes. The Minister explained that this decision had become necessary following a number of rows that had broken out on the air on radio and television. The decision comes as a serious blow to two very popular broadcasts - Top Congo FM's *"Libre antenne"* and Télé Kin Malebo's *"Télé chat"*.

With the same reasoning, the Minister has ordered religious and specialist radio and TV stations to "abstain from broadcasting political and news programmes, or acting as a platform for political propaganda, or face the penalties laid down by the law".

In a communiqué published on 20 January 2005, JED (*Journaliste en Danger*) called on the Minister of Information and Press, as well as the High Media Authority (HAM) to "set up a representative negotiation framework to examine and standardise the terms of reference for radio and television". The NGO also suggested that the two bodies examine the question of phone-in programmes on a case-by-case basis "so as not to deprive the public of its right to free, responsible expression". The Minister considered that those taking part in a discussion forum should identify themselves, so that they can be called on to defend their statements if necessary.

FB / IPP

DRC: Reporters in the Great Lakes carry out joint assignments

From 31 January to 6 February, fifteen journalists from DRC, Burundi and Rwanda took part in a regional workshop on radio production on the theme of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). The workshop was held at the Bukavu / Nguba Protestant Centre.

First, all of the journalists taking part were able to meet various resource persons concerned with former child soldiers. They then broke into three groups (each with a mix of all three nationalities) to produce three joint assignments: *Children at school, not at war*; *The child at the heart of the conflict*; and *DDR in South-Kivu*, based on interviews carried out in the field. At the end of the workshop, all participants left with the resulting joint stories, to be broadcast by their respective radio stations.

The Bukavu workshop is the third of its kind, following on from those in Bujumbura in October 2004, and Kigali in November the same year. The workshops were organised by Panos Paris (IPP) and Search for Common Ground (SFCG) with the aim of consolidating exchange and collaboration between journalists from these three countries, while also helping to raise awareness of the common issues preoccupying all countries in the region.

DM / IPP

4. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE MEDIA

Burundi: RPA suspends Net Press

On 11 February the National Communication Council (CNC) decided to suspend the press agency, *Net Press*, for seven days. The CNC also suspended broadcasts by *Radio publique africaine* (RPA) for 48 hours, until midnight on Sunday 13 February.

There were several complaints against *Net Press*, including having broadcast "libellous, outrageous and damaging" statements concerning Dr. Jean Minani, president of the Front for Democracy in Burundi party, on 18 January, 4 and 6 February 2005. The chairman of CNC, Jean-Pierre Manda, also called on Jean-Claude Kavumbagu, director of *Net Press*, to furnish material proof, by Thursday 10 February, to back up his claims that the chairman of CNRS (the National Disaster Fund), was "caught red-handed embezzling funds".

Meanwhile, the CNC accuses RPA of having distorted a message by the chairman of PARENA (the National Recovery Party) on 11 December 2004, having broadcast items on 13 December 2004 that could incite civil unrest, and having covered a story on 24 December, which offended morals and good behaviour.

RPA is also accused of having broadcast defamatory comments and invading the privacy of an individual, Simon Simbeshere, from 24 to 30 November 2004, as well as defamatory and outrageous comments against the Minister of Public Security, Lieutenant-Colonel Donatien Sidakira, on 26 and 27 January 2005.

The radio station is also being questioned for calumny against Dieudonné Giteruzi, a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Finance, on 4 and 5 February 2005, without giving him the right to reply. CNC decided to investigate, even though Mr Giteruzi did not file a complaint.

DN / IPP

Central Africa: High Communication Council set up

The Republic of Central Africa's President signed a decree authorising the creation of a national High Communication Council (HCC) on 19 January 2005. The decree removes the final obstacle to setting up this institution, which is mentioned in the Constitution and was approved by the National Transition Council in November 2004. The HCC will be an independent media regulatory body, mainly involved in guaranteeing equitable and appropriate use of the public sector press, radio and television, while providing necessary arbitration as required.

An official list of HCC members was published on 28 January 2005, following an annual general meeting in Bangui, with delegates from the Union of Central African Journalists (UJCA), the Independent Press Publishers Group (GEPPIC) and the Central Africa Association of Independent Press Publishers (ACEPI). At present, members of the team include Mrs Fernande Sacknot (journalist), Mrs Delphine Zouta (journalist), Mr Joseph-Vermond Tchendo (journalist), Mr Magba-Totama (journalist), Mr Hilaire Guitongo (journalist), Mr Jérôme Dounian-Doté (journalist), Mr Tita Samba Solé (broadcaster - journalist), Mr Philippe Manga Mabada (telecommunications engineer), Ms Opalagna (lawyer). The Head of State also has to designate a further two persons.

FS / IPP

Equatorial Guinea: Government dismisses twenty media workers

Equatorial Guinea's Minister of Information, Mr Alfonso Nsue Mokuy, has decided to "permanently let go of" over twenty employees in radio, television and the government paper, *Ebano*, for "irregular and ill-intentioned behaviour". The measure affects twenty staff of Equatorial Guinea Radio and Television (RTVGE), including journalists and technicians, some with over 20 years' employment at the channel, as well as three journalists from *Ebano*.

The decision followed a meeting on 25 January of the Minister of Information and all staff from these media. According to an official source during the meeting, "an exhaustive analysis has shown that the poor operation of this department is due to the irregular and ill-intentioned behaviour" of these state employees, who are also accused of "various irregularities, such as indiscipline, incompetence and insubordination".

At a 27 January cabinet meeting, the president, Mr Teodoro Obiang Nguema also deplored the "poor operation" of the Ministry of Information and the "lack of coordination" on the part of its directors.

RAN / IPP

Rwanda: HCP calls Umurage to order

The High Council for the Press (HCP) intervened on 25 January, calling on the newspaper *Umurage*, to publish a correction regarding allegations in its 31 December - 8 January issue against the national insurance company, Sonarwa. The company filed a complaint with the HCP accusing the paper of defamation for publishing an article claiming Sonarwa was closing because of bankruptcy.

During the hearing at HCP's premises in Kigali, the Director of Sonarwa, Mrs Marie-Claire Mukasine, insisted that the author of the article had access to all the necessary information about the company. "The publication of this kind of biased article shows a deliberate intention on the behalf of the journalist concerned to damage the credibility of the company," she added.

After hearing the accused journalist, the HCP found that he was unable to support his allegations, calling on the newspaper's editor-in-chief to publish the necessary corrections in the next issue.

This is the second complaint recorded by the HCP since it was set up in March 2003. The first case was between the newspaper, *Umuseso*, the most popular of the independent papers, and the vice-president of the House of Deputies. That case ended up in court.

GR / IPP

Rwanda: HCP's monitoring protocol questioned

The Rwandan Office of Information (ORINFOR) refused to turn up at a hearing of the High Press Council (HCP) on 18 February 2005. ORINFOR's Director, Joseph Bideri, considered that the procedure for the HCP hearing was not recognised by law.

The HCP referred to its instruction No 6 on hearing procedures, when it summoned ORINFOR to explain itself regarding an article in issue 1585 of 23 - 30 January 2005 of the government weekly *Imvaho Nshya* (in the *kinyarwanda* language) owned by ORINFOR.

The HCP had received a complaint from Father Alexis Birindabagabo, the protestant bishop of the diocese of Gahini (in the east of the country), accusing the paper of publishing a defamatory article claiming that he had embezzled church funds.

Although the director of ORINFOR refused to appear before the HCP, he pointed out that the plaintiff had been given the right of reply, as laid down by the press legislation. The HCP felt that ORINFOR's explanations were not founded and asked its director to correct the errors contained in its article, and to publish an apology to the offended party in its next issue.

GR / IPP

5. STRUCTURING AND PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE MEDIA

Gabon: Creation of a self-regulation body

Press publishes in Gabon, meeting on 1 March as part of the Independent Print Media Workers Association (APPEL) set up a new Independent Press Self-regulatory Body of Gabon (Ogapel).

This group of journalists and heads of independent newspapers aims to “keep a watch on rules of conduct to be observed by APPEL members, and to ensure media coverage of elections in the Republic of Gabon”.

The founders of this organisation drafted a code of conduct which was adopted on 1 March, and which they promise to respect.

APPEL, which is one of the most active associations of publishers in Gabon, is directed by Norbert Ngoua Mezui, publications director of the bi-monthly *N'ku Le Messenger* and Jean Yves Ntoutoume, who runs the weekly, *Le Temps*. The association has ten independent papers as its members: *N'ku Le Messenger*, *Le Temps*, *La Lowé*, *La Nation*, *La Crocodile*, *Gabaon*, *Femmes d'Aujourd'hui*, *Afrique Elite Magazine*, *Le Nganga* and *le Scribouillard*.

AN / IPP

Gabon: Gabon's national order of professional journalists is born

The Gabon National Order of Professional Journalists (ONJPG) was set up on 17 February in Libreville, during its inaugural General Assembly. It will bring together journalists holding a professional press card, in an effort to restore a sense of dignity to the profession in the eyes of the public.

This socio-professional organisation has a number of objectives, including promoting the professional, material and moral interests of its members, respect by journalists for the code of communication (law n°12/2001 of 12 December 2001), and defending press freedoms according to the laws and regulations in force.

The ONJPG also promises to provide in-service training via seminars and workshops and to provide information that is precise, honest, complete and verifiable. To fulfil these promises, members will use the press to fight against tribalism, xenophobia, incitement to hatred and violence, flights of fantasy of all forms, immorality, condoning war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The administrative structure of the ONJPG consists of a General Assembly and a Council, directed by a nine-member Committee elected by their peers for a renewable, three-year mandate and responsible for the day-to-day running of the Order. The current secretary-general is Joseph Loembé, who previously spent a year as head of the National Professional Press Card Commission.

AN / IPP

DRC: OMEC publishes Code of conduct for journalists

In Kinshasa, on 24 February 2005, the Congolese Media Observatory (OMEC) published its “Code of Conduct for Journalists in DRC”. Adopted by the Congolese National Press Union (UNPC) in March 2004, it consists of 21 articles, 15 of them dealing with journalists' responsibilities and six with their rights.

The Chair of OMEC's executive council, Polydor Muboyayi, pointed out that Congolese journalists now possess a “real *vade mecum* of principles and standards, which they will adopt as their own code of honour”.

The publication of the Code of Conduct, said Mr Muboyayi, is effectively the beginning of OMEC's work of monitoring and mediation. OMEC was set up following the National Press Congress and has already received, and dealt with, sixty complaints. These mostly concerned defamation and libellous claims, Mr Muboyayi explained.

OMEC has also made available to journalists a survey by Léopold Mbuyi on the issue of defamation and libel by the press.

Besides these two texts, the newly published 36-page document also contains OMEC's monitoring checklist, as well as a statement to which Congolese journalists promise to adhere.

FB / IPP

DRC: National press strategy being drafted

During a workshop in Kinshasa from 18 to 21 January 2005, with support from UNESCO, the Minister for Press and Information set out the main lines of his strategy for the press. Participants at the workshop recommended changes to the law, notably concerning decriminalisation of infringements of laws governing the press and revisions to the law on the professional status of journalists in DRC. They also called for the protection of union rights for media workers as well as insisting on the need to promote a high-quality public information service, especially allowing the public radio and TV station, RTNC to exercise independence in its editorial line.

As well as calling for free access to information sources, participants suggested ways to inject new energy into the private-sector press, which it says is beleaguered by slavish ties to the politics of those in power, small circulation, short-lived publications put together by poorly paid staff lacking training in new information technologies, with amateur management and out of date equipment, etc.

The workshop recommendations will be incorporated into the Minister's strategy for the press, which is due to be finalised at a working group meeting scheduled for February.

Participants at the workshop came from professional press associations (SNPP, UCOFEM, UNPC, ANECO, APAC, UPF, ARCO, ANEAP, AJPF, ANEP) as well as the Minister for Press and Information and the High Authority for the Media.

FB / IPP

DRC: Congolese journalists advocate code of practice days

Around thirty journalists and representatives of professional media organisations meeting in Kinshasa on 22 January on the initiative of *Journalistes en Danger (JED)*, recommended that special "code of practice days" be organised. The aim is to increase journalists' respect for of their professional code of practice, and encourage them to be more responsible in the way they handle and disseminate information.

The participants recognised that recent lapses were due to "political interference in the media in run-up to the elections". They also criticised the hold that politicians have over the media that they own, thus compromising their independence. Participants also criticised a Ministry of Press and Information circular banning religious and specialised stations from broadcasting political programmes, as well as suspending phone-in programmes. The participants felt this was evidence of "the open intention of the Minister to gag the independent media and prevent them from offering the public a forum for free expression". Participants also considered that journalists were responsible for putting out "inflammatory political slogans, messages of hate and incitement to violence and disorder", according to a JED communiqué at the end of the meeting.

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