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Gabon: CNC calls Gabon's media to order

At a plenary session on 14 September in Libreville, Gabon's National Communication Council (CNC) decided to close down two radio stations, *Ogooué FM* in Libreville and *Medouneu FM* in Medouneu, in the Northern province of Woleu-Ntem, for failing to observe procedures for setting up a new media. The stations will remain closed until they have completed all the formalities for creating a radio or television enterprise, which includes receiving the CNC's authorisation.

Six other stations were also sent warnings for ignoring article 69 of the law on communication which forbids "the President of the Republic, civil servants, magistrates, and members of the armed and security forces from owning or running a radio or television broadcasting enterprise". The radio stations in question are *Radio Unité*, *Radio Notre Dame du Perpétuel Secours*, *Radio Nyangou*, *Radio Génération Nouvelle*, *Radio Nkul FM* and *Radio Nord-Sud*.

Also, the CNC sent warnings to 16 newspapers that have been appearing regularly or irregularly, flouting article 101 of the same communication law, which stipulates that "incompatibilities and prohibitions mentioned in article 69 also apply to the printed media". The publications in question are: *La Nouvelle Tribune*, *Gens d'Ici*, *La Pirogue*, *La voix des Jeunes*, *Jeunesse Action*, *Elite Afrique Magazine*, *La Démocratique*, *Ezo Mbolo*, *Notre Pays*, *Nku'u le Messenger*, *Le Témoin*, *Le Phare*, *Le Crocodile*, *Sport Elite*, *Orety*, and *La Nation*.

On 12 August, in protest against the suspension of *Nku'U Le Messenger*, 14 independent newspapers in Gabon, all members of the Independent Free Press Association (Appel), decided to withdraw their own publications from the newsstands for an indefinite period. In a press release, the publishers of *Le Temps*, *Le Nganga*, *Le Crocodile*, *Le Scribouillard*, *La Nation*, *Gabaon*, *Femmes d'Aujourd'hui*, *Elite Afrique Magazine*, *Nku'U Le Messenger*, *Le Journal*, *Tango*, *La Lowé*, *La Démocratie* and *L'Espoir* explained that the CNC considered Mr Ngoua Mezui's paper to be partisan. "CNC's sanction against our colleague is nothing less than arbitrary," says the Appel communiqué. "It is illegal, because it has no foundation in law.

From CNC's point of view, Mr Ngoua Mezui is not a trained journalist, but a teacher, and should therefore not benefit from certain rights reserved for journalists. The regulatory body cites article 12 of the communication law to back up its case. This article stipulates that a journalist is defined as "the holder of a diploma awarded by a State-recognised school of journalism, with at least one year of professional experience, or any person writing articles, and radio and television news presenters, whose main source of income comes from these activities and who have at least 2 years' experience".

Norbert Ngoua Mezui has been both editor and director of *Nku'U Le Messenger* since October 2002. Prior to this, he was editor of the fortnightly, *Misamu*, for several years, which CNC also banned.

AN / IPP

1. DIARY

France: Conference on Media for a Culture of Peace

Signis, the world Catholic news association is holding a conference at the Valpré Centre in Lyons (France), on 5 and 6 November, on the theme of "Media for a Culture of Peace". The aim of this meeting, which is open to the public, is to show the contribution that the media can make to foster peace today. For Signis, the purpose of the media "is to provide means of communication within society, to be mediators bringing us together in a humane spirit of solidarity. They help create unity in diversity amongst human beings". Several other events will run in parallel with this conference, such as professional workshops on cinema, television, radio and the internet (7-8 November), and a symposium on media education (5-8 November).
MPL / IPP

For further information and to register for the various events, see:

<http://www.signis.net/congress2005/conference-paix.htm>

2. PRINT MEDIA NEWS

Gabon: A new fortnightly paper, AZ

AZ is Gabon's new 8-page news and opinion fortnightly paper, founded by Alain Engouang Nzé. Priced at 500 FCfa, the paper is printed by Macacos de Douala with a run of 3000, and distributed by Sogapress.

According to its director and founder, AZ should be an opportunity to "archive daily life", with several articles devoted to national, African and international current affairs, with an accent on society, politics and the economy.

AN / IPP

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3. TELEVISION AND RADIO NEWS

DRC: RATECO organises distribution of radio transmitters

At a meeting in Bukavu on 26 July 2005, the executive committee of *Rateco*, the network of community radio and television in the East of DR Congo, established the principles for handing out radio transmitters and building the institutional capacity of its members. These principles aim to improve working conditions for the weaker stations, while bringing their administrative paperwork up to date.

Six radio transmitters will be given out, three to stations in North-Kivu province, two in South-Kivu and one in Maniema. The recipients will, in turn, give their old material to other stations in the network that are even more poorly equipped than they are.

Rateco will also look at member stations' administrative paperwork and help some of them to obtain the official documents they require to operate within the law.

This operation is supported by IPP and Niza.

DM / IPP

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Chad: FM Liberté staff laid off

The entire staff of the non-profit radio station, *FM Liberté*, will be laid off as from 15 October 2005, according to a notice letter the station has sent to its employees. In the letter, the station's director explains that: "*FM Liberté* is going through a serious financial crisis and is unable to meet its financial commitments". To ensure its survival, the letter goes on, "the board of directors has drawn up plans for downsizing. This will include reducing the number of personnel to a more acceptable size".

Once all the staff has been laid off, they will be able to reapply for jobs in the new, smaller set-up.

LG / IPP

4. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE MEDIA

Cameroon: Independent media receive State grants

In Yaounde over the past few weeks, 76 press publishers have been receiving the second payment of a 2004 State grant to support independent media. The total budget for this initiative is about 45 million Fcfa (67,800 euros).

Nine kinds of private news structures are eligible for the grant: enterprises publishing newspapers at regular intervals, printers working at least one third of the time setting and printing newspapers and periodicals, newspaper and magazine distributors, television and radio enterprises, internet-based press enterprises, communication consultancy agencies and professional news organisations.

For 2005, the Ministry of Communication expects to lower the grant from 150 million FCfa (229,000 euros) to 121 million FCfa (185,000 euros).

JW / IPP

DRC: Three independent papers suspended

On 19 September, DRC's media watchdog body, HAM (High Authority for the Media) decided to suspend three independent newspapers: *Pool Malebo*, *Le Journal* and *L'Ouragan*.

Le Journal (n°181) and its supplement *Pool Malebo* (n°20) are accused of publishing articles claiming that DRC donated US\$30 million to the education sector in the Republic of Tanzania, at a time when DRC's government was locked into a conflict with unions in its own education sector. According to the HAM "this article contains unsubstantiated claims and damaging allegations, made with a total absence of rigour and in a quest for sensationalism, contrary to articles 2, 3, 6, 11 and 13 of the Code of Conduct and Ethics for Journalists in DRC".

The HAM accuses *L'Ouragan* (n° 215) not only of having published an article on the donation, but also an analysis by *Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent*, from its 15 March 2003 edition, on abuses committed in 2002 by a few soldiers of the former rebel movement, MLC. The HAM considered that reproducing this article was "not consistent with the goals of reconciliation and peace assigned to the Transition government by the Global and Inclusive Agreement".

Following the media watchdog's decisions, the association *Journalistes en danger* sent a letter to the HAM's president, Modeste Mutinga, saying it was "shocked and very concerned by the decision of 19 September 2005 to suspend the Kinshasa newspapers, *Pool Malebo*, *Le Journal* and *L'Ouragan*, for three months". It asked the HAM to lift its "iniquitous suspension of the three newspapers concerned".

JED / IPP

5. STRUCTURING AND PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE MEDIA

Burundi: Workshop on media and democratic transition

A workshop for journalists on “Media and the transition to democracy: ethics and social responsibility” was held at the Burundi Press Centre in Bujumbura from 29 to 31 August 2005, bringing together 50 journalists from the public and independent press.

They were encouraged to exercise their social responsibility to the full, by respecting ethics and codes of conduct, in order to move forward on the path of transition towards democracy. The participants requested the government to collaborate more closely with the media and to encourage the development of freedom of expression.

It was agreed that the media regulatory body, the National Communication Council (CNC), should have an adequate budget, permanent staff, and that it should become independent of the government. It was proposed that members of the CNC should be elected and have their own budget. They also considered that the Burundi Press Observatory (OPB) should also have adequate equipment and funds to operate, with a clear legal status and with financial contributions from the media themselves.

Organised by the Burundi Press Centre, the workshop received financial support from the NGO, IFES.

DaN / IPP

Central Africa: Training seminar for editors

A training seminar on “Exigencies and challenges for press publishers” was held from 12 to 16 September in Bangul, for twenty newspaper directors from six countries in Central Africa (Central African Republic, Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Congo, Chad and Gabon). The idea was to help media in these countries become genuine business enterprises, meeting established legal and social norms and adopting high standards of personnel and financial management.

At the end of the training, the directors made several recommendations, including boosting journalists’ training to encourage the emergence of quality newspapers, and to promote media pluralism as a means to strengthen freedom of expression, while respecting human rights.

Tidiane Dioh of *Agence Inter-gouvernementale de la Francophonie*, which organised the event, explained that the Republic of Central Africa had been selected to moderate the training seminar, because its press media are “sick” and in need of “strong medicine” if they are to avoid disappearing from the national and international stage.

SJB / IPP

Great Lakes: Media professionals from Great Lakes region get together

On 3 and 4 September, ten journalists representing media in Burundi, DRC and Rwanda gathered in Nairobi to follow up on recommendations arising from a series of focused workshops on “The media and the Great Lakes conference process” which were held in Bujumbura on 12 August 2005, in Kigali on 25 August 2005 and Kinshasa on 29 August 2005.

Supported by Institut Panos Paris, the meeting enabled participants to target the priority activities for the regional Bagamoyo plan of action. Participants were also able to study the various opinions of journalists that came out of the focused workshops, concerning projects for the media sector drafted by experts at the Great Lakes conference.

Other recommendations included strengthening existing initiatives in the sub-region, such as joint reporting assignments, and the creation of multiplex sub-regional broadcasts, able to be transcribed for publication in newspapers in the sub-region. The first multiplex broadcast was scheduled for November. The second activity that won approval was the creation of a Regional Production and Broadcast Centre.

At the meeting, Professor Julien Nimubona, consultant to the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region on issues of democracy and good governance, presented two media projects that had come out of the Great Lakes conference. Participants expressed their concerns regarding the independence and freedom of the proposed media watchdog

body, given that it would come under State administration. They also recommended improving the proposed protocol by adding amendments on State commitments regarding legal and fiscal frameworks favouring greater professionalism, independence and freedom of the media.

CN / IPP

Africentr@lemedias is published monthly by the Institut Panos Paris (IPP) as part of its **Central Africa programme Pluralist media for peace and democracy**. This monthly newsletter on media pluralism is prepared by journalists from the nine Central Africa countries (Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic (RCA), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Chad), with the support of CORDAID (Netherlands) and DFID (UK).

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