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Burundi: Agency for Regulation and Control of Telecommunications Changes Ministry

As from 28 November 2005, the Agency for the Regulation and Control of Telecommunications (ARCT), which had previously come under the Ministry of Defence, is now part of the Ministry for Transport, Post and Telecommunications.

By taking this decision, the Burundi government has responded positively to some of the calls by independent radio stations for the ARCT to be controlled by a civil ministry. Professional journalists' associations wanted to have an interlocutor that was open to dialogue and negotiation, especially regarding the exorbitant costs of broadcasting licenses.

Until now, the ARCT assigned broadcast frequencies to both independent and public radio stations. On several occasions, this prerogative allowed the body to jam radio stations that had not paid the US\$3,100 (2,525 euros) broadcast license fee by the designated deadline.

Commenting on the change of ministry, the president of the Burundi Association of Radio broadcasters, (ABR), Jean-Jacques Ntamagara, said he hoped the authorities would now be more flexible regarding payment of the license fees

ET / IPP

1. PRINT MEDIA NEWS

Chad: *Infotchad*, new national daily on sale

On 13 January a trial copy of the new daily national *Infotchad* appeared on the newsstands, with the ambition of "*informing to edify and construct.*" The paper is published and directed by the Ministry for Communication and Culture.

According to the paper's leader writer, "*radio and television aside, the government has never had the right printed channels to support its actions and policies aimed at the national and foreign public.*" The editorial line of *Infotchad* is, he went on, partly to "*report on the government's actions and, if necessary, to explain the main events happening across the country.*"

And, he added, "*an important feature of Infotchad is that it uses credible sources of information, and shows professionalism in its coverage.*" The main source of news, he explained, is information gathered by the regional offices of *Agence tchadienne de presse*, the national wire service.

The paper is on sale at 200 CFA (0.30 euro).

LG / IPP

2. RADIO AND TV NEWS

DRC: A community radio station for Mbata Mbengi

On 25 December last year, a new community radio station, Nzola Kanda (RCN), began broadcasting on 93.8 MHz from the town of Mbata Mbengi.

For the time being, the station is using a generator-powered 50W transmitter, with a 10km range. The station puts out two services during the day, one from 6 am to 10 am, and the other from 4 pm to 10 pm, mostly programmes on health, education, civil society, farming, and nature conservation.

In order to get the station up and running quickly, the station's six technicians and broadcasters were trained by staff of Moanda community radio, and then Radio Ntemo in Mbanza-Ngungu.

Nzola Kanda (RCN) is an initiative of the Congolese Centre for Nature Conservation (CCPN), a development NGO.
MA / IPP

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DRC: Radio stations join forces in Bukavu to cover the referendum

From 17 - 20 December, sixteen journalists and two technicians from six radio stations of the Radio and Television Network of Eastern DRC (RATECO) joined together to cover the referendum on the constitution.

A centralised team of eight journalists, hosted by *Radio Maendeleo* and directed by Kamengele Omba (*Maendeleo*), presented four news broadcasts a day, simultaneously retransmitted by the other stations of the Synergie network (*Kahuzi, Maranatha, Maria, Neno la uzima, and Sauti ya rehema*). Other members of the RATECO network in the provinces of North-Kivu, Maniema and Eastern Province were also called upon to join the exchanges of news. Four correspondents covered events in the communes of Bagira, Ibanda, Kadutu, and Kasha in Bukavu, while four others were sent out to rural areas (Idjwi, Kabare Nord, Kabare Sud and Walungu). Journalists from the Lokole Centre also worked alongside Synergie via correspondents in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Tshikapa and Uvira.

Another radio synergy session was held in Kisangani to cover the elections.

These synergy sessions between non-profit and community radio stations are supported by Institut Panos Paris, in partnership with the NGO, Search for Common Ground, and with funding from the UK department for international development (DFID).

DM /IPP

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3. LEGAL AND ECONOMIC FRAMEWORKS FOR THE MEDIA

Great Lakes: Book on media regulation in the Great Lakes region

Institut Panos Paris has published a new book entitled *Media Regulation in the Great Lakes: defending press freedom or disciplining media players?*

This is the fourth work in the *Cahier des Médias pour la Paix* collection and is devoted to the three regulatory bodies in the Great Lakes region: the *national Communication Council* (CNC) in Burundi, the *High Authority for the Media* (HAM) in DRC and the *High Council of the Press* (HCP) in Rwanda. The 15 articles in this issue were written by journalists, media regulation staff, other players in the media world, and lawyers from the three countries.

The book aims to enable all media stakeholders in the Great Lakes region to gain a better grasp of the nature, vocation and operation of media regulatory bodies, the difficulties these young institutions face, and their efforts and accomplishments to date. It also aims to encourage regulators to see their role as one of defending press freedom.

MPL / IPP

The publication can be downloaded (in French) from:
<http://www.panosparis.org/fr/publications.php>

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DRC: The HAM reacts to coverage of the referendum

Based on a report from the Congolese Press Monitoring Centre (CEMPC) of 23 December 2005, the *High Authority for the media* (HAM) has published its conclusions on coverage of the referendum by print media, radio and television.

On 27 December, the HAM recommended that the directors of Congolese national radio and television (RTNC) sanction its programming and TV news producers for "serious neglect of the laws on referenda, of the HAM directive and the Code of Professional Conduct".

The media regulatory body criticises RTNC for what it considers was only partial coverage of the referendum campaign (2-16 December 2005). Through biased reporting, says the HAM, RTNC showed itself to favour a "yes" vote. The public channel is also accused of having broken a legally imposed media silence the day before the referendum, after the campaign was officially closed by HAM, on 16 December.

HAM has threatened to use its legal powers to sanction the channel's directors, who are legally responsible for broadcast content, if they fail again to follow procedure.

On 29 December, the HAM handed out one-month broadcasting suspensions to all seven independent television channels: *Télé Chat (RTKM)*, *Autres vérités (RTMV)*, *Palmarès politique (RTP)*, *Je dénonce et je revendique (RLTV)*, *Quatre vérités (RLTV)*, *Questions de l'heure (CEBS)*, *Aux dernières nouvelles (CEBS)* and *Leçon radiotélévisée (RATELKI)*, for having "illegally" broadcast campaign propaganda on the referendum (2-16 December 2005), in violation of the law, and an express HAM directive dated 18 November 2005.

HAM also issued a "severe reprimand" to radio and television stations and newspapers that they felt had violated the principles of impartiality and balance in their handling of information. The CEMPC report upon which HAM based its conclusions noted a bias in favour of a "yes" vote in the radio and television news programmes of *RTGA*, *Tropicana TV*, *CCTV*, *Antenne A*, *Horizon 33*, *Top Congo FM* and *Digital Congo* and in programmes broadcast by *CMB*, *Global TV* and *CEBS*. A bias in favour of a "no" vote was noticed in programmes broadcast by *RTMV*, *RTKM*, *RTP* and *RLTV*.

And, out of ten daily newspapers scrutinised, a bias in favour of a "yes" vote was observed in *La Référence Plus*, *Forum des As*, *Le Potentiel*, *l'Avenir*, *l'Observateur* and in favour of a "no" vote in *Le Phare* and *La Tempête des Tropiques*.

Only *Le Palmarès* and *La Prospérité* received a glowing report from the HAM for respecting the principle of fairness.

FB / IPP

For all of the HAM's decisions, see:

<http://www.ham-DRC.org>

4. STRUCTURING AND PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE MEDIA

DRC: Training for community radio journalists in East DRC

From 7 - 15 December 2005, fifteen journalists from community radio stations in Eastern DRC received training in microprogramming and production of public games programmes.

The workshops, held in Kisangani by Unicef aimed at public education on a range of issues, such as health, sexual attacks on women and children, HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation, in a post-conflict country. Experimental broadcasts that were produced in a

suburb of Kisangani are available on CD and cassette, and will soon be broadcast by community radio stations in eastern DRC as part of a public education campaign.

The workshop was part of a three-year Unicef programme in DRC running from 2003-2005. At the end of the training, the journalists, who had come from the provinces of Maniema, North Kivu, South Kivu and Estern province, formed a network to continue to support this Unicef programme.

FN / IPP

Rwanda: Official recognition for the Press Centre

On 21 December, eleven representatives from newspapers in Rwanda signed the statutes of the Press Centre, in the presence of Kigali's solicitor, François Ntaganda. This marked their support for the centre, which should bring journalists together, along with newspapers and professional journalists' associations.

This official recognition by the solicitor should give the green light for the Press Centre to apply to the Ministry of Justice for legal status. If the administrative procedures follow their course normally, Rwanda's Press Centre should receive official recognition by the end of January 2006.

The Centre has existed since 1996, but the new executive council, appointed in June 2005, wanted it to become a legally recognised institution.

RA / 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).

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