

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	665
Land:	Den Demokratiske Republik Congo
Kilde:	Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF)
Titel:	Mai-Mai rebel threat to journalists in eastern DRC
Udgivet:	21. januar 2021
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	25. maj 2021

Document #2044050

RSF – Reporters Sans Frontières

Mai-Mai rebel threat to journalists in eastern DRC

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) call on the authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo to take firm measures to improve the safety of journalists who are exposed to threats and violence by Mai-Mai militiamen and other armed groups in the east of the country.

Raka FM, a community radio station in Kazimia, in the eastern province of Sud-Kivu, is one of the latest targets. Members of a Mai-Mai rebel militia went to the [station](#) on the evening of 12 January looking for its director, **Jacques Mulengwa**. When they discovered he wasn't there, they promised to return.

The visit just came just a few hours after *Raka FM* broadcast a statement by the local army commander accusing the militia of attacking a nearby locality two days earlier. Mulengwa told RSF that, the day after the visit, the militiamen sent him an SMS message accusing him of being paid by the army to undermine their reputation within the local community. Fearing for his life, Mulengwa has stopped working at the radio station.

“What with threats, intimidation attempts, kidnappings and an execution-style murder, we have logged at least 13 Mai-Mai abuses against journalists and media outlets in the eastern DRC since 2019,” said Arnaud Froger, the head of RSF's Africa desk. *“It is unacceptable that journalists who are doing the absolutely vital work of covering difficult subjects in the eastern provinces are among the victims of violence, which is taking place with complete impunity and without any steps being taken to protect them. Inaction cannot be a response to this serious situation. We call for firm measures, such as the dedicated mechanism for protecting and securing journalists that RSF has been proposing.”*

One of the most recent previous cases of Mai-Mai violence registered by RSF was in June. **Bwira Bwalitse**, the manager of *Bakumbule* community radio in Nord-Kivu province, who often urged armed groups to lay down their arms in a programme he hosted, was [abducted](#) while returning home by motorcycle on 16 June. His colleagues were told a few days later that he had been killed. His body has not been found.

Mainly active in Nord-Kivu and Sud-Kivu provinces and divided into different groups, the Mai-Mai militias lack their own media outlets and do not hesitate to use threats and violence in an attempt to control coverage of their activities, whether by preventing radio stations from covering certain news items or pressuring them to cover others.

In November 2019, when the DRC was struggling to recover from an Ebola outbreak, **Papy Mumbere Mahamba**, a journalist who hosted a programme about Ebola on a community radio station in Lwemba, a village near the town of Mambasa in neighbouring Ituri province, was [murdered](#) by Mai-Mai in his home.

Like many other rebel groups, the [Mai-Mai](#) had strongly opposed the measures being taken to combat the Ebola epidemic. They also threatened to burn down the radio station and kill all of its journalists, forcing it to [cease operating](#). Several other radio stations in the Mambasa area reacted by ceasing to mention Ebola on the air.

Two other journalists were forced in hiding in May 2019 after being threatened. One was **David Munyanga**, the manager of a community radio station in Kiliba, in Sud-Kivu province, whose home was attacked by a Mai-Mai group carrying guns. He was threatened and roughed up for reporting information that led to a member of their group being arrested by the army. The same group had kidnapped Munyanga for several hours the previous month.

In the absence of significant reforms, President Félix Tshisekedi's declared desire to promote the role of the media in the DRC has not led to any improvement. The level of abuses against journalists and media is still very worrying, especially in the east of the country, where violence reigns.

Of the 13 Mai-Mai abuses against journalists and media that RSF has registered since 2019, nine were cases of threats and four involved actual use of force or violence, including a murder and an enforced disappearance. The resulting climate of terror has led to a great deal self-censorship and, in the past two years, three radio stations decided to stop broadcasting, at least temporarily.

The DRC is ranked 150th out of 180 countries in RSF's 2020 [World Press Freedom Index](#).

ecoi.net summary:

Article on the threat to
journalists by Mai-Mai rebels
and other armed groups in the East
of the country

Country:

Congo, Democratic Republic

Source:

[RSF – Reporters Sans Frontières](#)

Original link:

<https://rsf.org/en/news/mai-mai-rebel-threat-journalists-eastern-drc>

Document type:

Appeal or News Release

Language:

English

Published:

21 January 2021

Document ID:

2044050

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

