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2013 Scores

Press Status: Not Free

Press Freedom Score: 83

Legal Environment: 26

Political Environment: 33

Economic Environment: 24

Press freedom conditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remained deplorable in 2012, with unrest related to the rebel insurgency in eastern Congo posing continued threats to the general media environment. The 2005 constitution and the country's laws provide for freedom of speech, information, and the press, but these rights are limited in practice by President Joseph Kabila's government and various nonstate actors. Criminal defamation and libel laws are regularly used to detain and intimidate journalists and to shut down media outlets. In April, two journalists with *Kisangani News* were detained after publishing an article critical of a national deputy. The publisher of the Kinshasa-based newspaper *Le Fax* was held for three days in November for alleging that the minister of youth, sports, and recreation had embezzled funds. Also in November, Dadou Etiom of Nzondo TV and Guy Ngiaba of Télé 50 were jailed for nine days in the southwestern province of Bandundu after criticizing the president of the provincial assembly. The DRC does not have an access to information law.

Local media outlets are subject to regulation by the High Authority on Media (HAM). The agency's mandate is to ensure freedom of expression, but it has the power to temporarily suspend outlets for hate speech and other serious ethical transgressions, and its decisions have at times been criticized as politically biased. In 2009, the National Assembly passed a bill establishing the High Council for Broadcasting and Communication (CSAC), another regulatory agency mandated to guarantee the freedom and protection of the press. Kabila appointed the CSAC's 15 members in 2011, but the body's work was paralyzed in March 2012 when its members expressed deep concerns about the leadership of its president, who they accused of embezzlement, incompetence, tribalism, and corruption. Journalists' rights groups have long criticized the CSAC for its vulnerability to political manipulation and apathy toward the prosecution of crimes against journalists. In March, two local journalists' rights organizations, Journaliste en Danger (JED) and

Freedom for Journalists (FFJ), demanded that yet another state agency, the Ministry for Media and Communication, be shut down, calling it a "media tormenter," not an impartial body.

Journalists and media outlets face censorship and harassment from multiple sources, including national and local government officials, members of the security forces, and nonstate actors. Reporters and outlets perceived as sympathetic to opposition parties faced the worst treatment. The suspension of broadcasts and closure of outlets by government officials was also common. In September, Radio Lisanga Télévision (RLTV), which is owned by prominent opposition politician Roger Lumbala, had its service suspended without explanation. Authorities closed down Radio Télévision Autonome du Sud Kasai (RTAS), in the south central town of Miabi, in August on suspicions that its owner was conspiring to overthrow the Kabila government, and in November a local mayor shut down Radio Ngoma FM, in the volatile east, after the station aired comments by the leader of a local armed group. Censorship also affects international media outlets. The government banned transmission of Radio France Internationale (RFI) in January for its coverage of the controversial November 2011 presidential elections, and in July refused entry to Belgian journalist Thierry Michel, who had produced a documentary profiling the murder of a prominent Congolese human rights activist.

No journalists were killed or disappeared during the year, but reporters were particularly susceptible to intimidation and censorship amid the conflict in eastern Congo between the March 23 (M23) rebel group and the Congolese army. In May, the governor of eastern North Kivu province threatened a journalist from United Nations-sponsored Radio Okapi, accusing her of biased reporting on clashes between Congolese soldiers and army defectors taking place in the area. The private daily *Le Journal* was banned in June by the communications minister following the publication of an editorial accusing Congolese of Rwandan ancestry of colluding with Rwanda in its military involvement in the conflict, an accusation the minister said incited racism and tribalism. In August, the CSAC made it illegal for radio programs and television talk shows to discuss the conflict in the east, and shut down numerous stations for failure to comply. Radio Liberté was ordered off the air for three months in May, before the CSAC ban, for airing interviews with a militia leader and a mutineer, and a presenter for the station was imprisoned without charge for 13 days. In August, Radio Soleil was taken off the air for three months for airing an interview with an M23 spokesman, and Ngoma FM was suspended indefinitely in October for its interview with a spokesman for a group of mutineers. In December, authorities from the CSAC shut down Radio Okapi, which was highly popular in the region, for four days, citing administrative noncompliance. Observers believed the closure was due to the station's interview with Jean-Marie Runiga, an M23 leader. In addition to governmental restrictions on press freedom, the emergence of the M23 rebel group has accelerated the deterioration of the media environment in the region. At least three journalists went into hiding between August and September after being threatened for their critical reporting by the M23. The M23 also claimed responsibility for attacks on Radio Solidarité in December.

Among other violent incidents, in March masked arsonists set fire to the antenna of Radio Télévision Kindu Maniema (RTKM) in east central Maniema province. The station was known to be critical of the provincial governor, who had previously demanded that it cease its call-in broadcasts. One of the RTKM's hosts went into hiding for fear that he would be arrested. In the eastern city of Goma, radio host Tuvur Wundi reported receiving multiple death threats in March; his home had been attacked by armed men in January.

Given low literacy rates and deep poverty, the population of the DRC relies largely on radio broadcasts to receive news reports. Many private newspapers are nevertheless published, particularly in Kinshasa, and although they are not always objective, they are often highly critical of the government. There are several hundred privately owned radio and television stations, in addition to three state-owned radio stations and a state-owned television station. The state broadcasters reportedly favor Kabila's party, though other political parties represented in the government are occasionally given airtime. The only nationwide independent radio network,

Radio Okapi, has set new standards for reporting and media objectivity in a volatile political environment. Most media outlets are reportedly owned by public figures and businessmen, and are used for political propaganda rather than objective reporting. Journalists at major outlets are usually poorly paid and lack sufficient training, leaving them vulnerable to bribery and political manipulation.

While internet access has spread in urban areas thanks to the proliferation of private, affordable internet cafés, only about 1.7 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2012. The government does not restrict access to the internet or monitor its content.

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