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Journalists covering eastern DRC conflict face death threats, censorship



Congolese journalists (from left) Jonathan Mupenda, Jonas Kasula, and Daniel Michombero have received death threats following their coverage of the M23 rebel group's assault on the Democratic Republic of the Congo's eastern city of Goma. (Photos of Mupenda and Kasula: Courtesy of the journalists. Screenshot of Michombero: TV5Monde)

Kinshasa, January 30, 2025—The M23 rebel group's [assault](#) on the Democratic Republic of the Congo's eastern city of [Goma](#) has brought familiar dangers for Congolese journalists, who for years have navigated [intimidation](#) and [attacks](#) from government and armed groups in the country's restive, mineral-rich east.

Advances by the M23, which [United Nations experts](#) say is supported by the Rwandan military — charges Rwanda has denied — in combat against DRC government forces, have intensified authorities' efforts to control reporting about the conflict.

DRC ministers have accused journalists of supporting terrorism for reporting on rebel advances, suspended the Qatari-based Al Jazeera, withdrawn accreditation for the broadcaster's reporters, and threatened to suspend other media outlets.

At the same time, journalists in Goma have told CPJ they are concerned for their safety; at least three reporters have received threatening messages. Rights groups have [warned](#) that civilians are at heightened [risk](#) of violence and called for their protection.

“The [escalation](#) of the [long-running conflict](#) in eastern DRC has worsened already harsh conditions for journalists trying to cover the conflict. All parties must prioritize the safety of journalists,” said Angela Quintal, head of CPJ's Africa program. “Sadly, we are seeing death threats against journalists and Congolese authorities pursuing a strategy of censorship similar to that used by other governments to stifle public interest reporting of wars and security concerns.”

‘We will finish you’

Jonas Kasula, a reporter for the private online news site *Labour Info*, and Jonathan Mupenda, a correspondent for the private channel *Molière TV*, told CPJ they had been living in [fear](#) since January 9, forced into [hiding](#) after they began receiving text [messages](#) threatening to kill them. The messages from unknown local numbers, reviewed by CPJ, warned the Goma-based journalists that they were under surveillance.

The messages specifically referenced their presence in [Bweremana](#), a village about 40 kilometers (25 miles) west of Goma, where they had gone to cover the [fighting](#). In early January, Kasula had [published](#) a report about the government-aligned [Wazalendo](#) militia’s resistance to advancing M23 and Rwandan forces. The M23 [took control](#) of Bweremana on January 21.

“On the 31st [of December], you were in Bweremana with your colleague Jonathan, we had all the possibilities to end your lives. But know that we control all your movements and once we arrive in Goma, know that your fate will be sealed,” one [message](#) said.

Separately, Goma-based freelance reporter Daniel Michombero posted a [photo](#) of his family on the social media platform X on January 26 and received several threatening replies accusing him of distributing “[fake news](#)” and suggesting that he may want to [flee to Rwanda](#) with other Congolese refugees or seek [protection from the M23](#) to escape retribution. A [reply](#) to a separate post on January 30 suggested he be [arrested](#) and traded for detained opponents of the government.

In 2021, Michombero and his wife were [attacked](#) in their home by men in military uniforms after he reported on local criticism of authorities’ response to a volcanic eruption near Goma.

‘Terrorists have no right to speak’

The DRC government has also threatened the press for reporting on the escalating conflict.

In a January 7 [post](#) on X, Christian Bosembe, president of the regulatory Higher Council for Audiovisual and Communication (CSAC), [threatened](#) to suspend French news outlets Radio France Internationale (RFI), France 24, and TV5Monde’s Africa program for reporting the “alleged advances of terrorists.”

“We respect freedom of expression and information, but we firmly condemn any apology for terrorism. Terrorists have no right to speak in our country,” he said.

Similarly, when government forces [recaptured](#) territory a few days later, justice minister Constant Mutamba [congratulated them on X](#), while warning that anyone, including journalists, who “relays the activities” of the M23 and Rwandan forces “will now suffer the full force of the law (DEATH PENALTY.)” The DRC [lifted](#) a 21-year moratorium on executions in 2024.

On January 9, following the airing of an Al Jazeera [interview](#) with M23 leader Bertrand Bisimwa, DRC communications minister Patrick Muyaya [told a news conference](#) that media accreditation for Al Jazeera journalists had been withdrawn because of their interview with the “head of a terrorist movement,” which he likened to an “apology for terrorism” that was “totally unacceptable.”

“We are in a context of crisis and everyone must understand because we can even consider more radical measures,” he warned the assembled journalists.

On January 13, the [regulator](#) suspended Al Jazeera for [90 days](#) for the interview, which it said “destabilized institutions of the republic.”

Controlling the narrative

Congolese authorities’ tactics echo those used by governments across the world, from [Russia to the](#)

[Sahel](#), seeking to control information about conflict in their territory. During the Israel-Gaza war, Al Jazeera was [banned](#) in [Israel](#) and the occupied [West Bank](#) by authorities, citing incitement and security concerns.

In 2022, Mali's military government suspended RFI and France 24 because on the grounds that they published "[false allegations](#)" of abuses by Mali's army, while authorities in Burkina Faso have [suspended](#) several outlets over their [coverage](#) of the country's [military](#) and security situation.

In December, Niger's military government [suspended](#) the British public broadcaster BBC for undermining troop morale and [announced](#) its intention to file a complaint against RFI following the outlets' reporting on jihadist attacks.

CPJ's text message requesting comment from M23 spokesperson Lawrence Kanyuka, calls to Muyaya, and message to Al Jazeera via its website did not receive any responses.