

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	797
Land:	Den Demokratiske Republik Congo
Kilde:	RSF – Reporters Sans Frontières
Titel:	All parties to Nord-Kivu conflict asked to respect journalists' work
Udgivet:	15. marts 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	28. august 2023

All parties to Nord-Kivu conflict asked to respect journalists' work

La protection des journalistes est nécessaire dans ce contexte de conflit entre les FARDC et rebelles du M23.

Guerchom Ndebo / AFP

In the northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo's Nord-Kivu province, media outlets are being directly impacted by the fighting between the March 23 Movement (M23) rebels and the DRC's armed forces, the FARDC. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and its local partner, Journalist in Danger (JED), call on all parties not to target journalists or force them to transmit their propaganda.

Caught between the violence of the M23 rebels and the government's counter-attacks, the media are being attacked, ransacked, censored and threatened. It is vital that journalists should be able to do their job in an impartial and independent manner, without being subjected to pressure. We ask all parties to the conflict to respect the work of the media, which are not propaganda tools.

Sadibou Marong

the director of RSF's sub-Saharan Africa desk

A ceasefire between the FARDC and the M23 rebels, who took up arms again in 2021, was supposed to take effect in Nord-Kivu on 7 March. But the journalists who are directly affected have seen no let-up in the fighting, which has also revived tension with neighbouring Rwanda, accused by the Congolese government of backing M23, a charge it denies. Despite the ceasefire, the fighting continues and journalists are threatened by a new wave in the harassment and reprisals to which they have been subjected since the start of February.

M23 threats and reprisals

In mid-February, M23 rebels summoned the heads of broadcast media operating in North Kivu's capital, Rutshuru, much of which is controlled by M23, according to an RSF source. The rebels accused the media directors of "inciting hatred" and ordered them to change their editorial line.

The rebels banned them from retransmitting *Top Congo FM* – which broadcasts from the DRC capital, Kinshasa, and is one of the region's most popular stations – for two months. And, at the same meeting, they banned them from carrying *Sauti ya Wahami* ("The Voice of the Displaced"), a programme that was being broadcast by more than 40 radio stations in Nord-Kivu. Produced in Goma by journalists who have fled the areas under M23 control, it interviews displaced civilians, who often accuse M23 of being at the source of the region's violence.

The region's media were instead ordered to broadcast a weekly programme called "Maisha ya Kwetu" ("Life at Home") that is led by an M23 member and, according to the rebels, aims to promote "social cohesion, peace and development, the encouragement of a climate of business, education, health and security."

The orders were accompanied by threats. "If a journalist does not respect the instructions, the punishment will not be long in coming," one media manager reported hearing. He added: "We are afraid, therefore we submit." And with good reason. The M23 rebels have already carried out violent attacks on media outlets in Nord-Kivu.

On 3 February, rebels looted *Radio Bashali*, a radio station based in a locality of the same name that is known for its impartial coverage of the conflict. Its journalists managed to save some of its equipment before fleeing. This was the second time that M23 members have attacked media

infrastructure. In June 2022, rebels [looted and ransacked](#) *Radio Voix de Miken* in nearby Bunagana. Its journalists fled to neighbouring Uganda.

Pressure from the DRC authorities

As well as the danger of physical reprisals from M23, there is the possibility of sanctions by the authorities. Alarmed by rebel control over the region's media, the High Council for Broadcasting and Communication (CSAC) issued a press release on 15 February [threatening legal proceedings](#) against media complying with M23 injunctions and relaying M23 information.

This reaction from the CSAC is "incomprehensible," journalists said. "They want to impose their law in areas they do not control," one said. "If we give the [rebel] militias an hour of airtime, they could prosecute us. But we have no choice. M23 scares us. We have been taken hostage."

A few days earlier, on 2 February, four journalists – photographer **Ismaël Matungulu**, *AFP* Goma correspondent **Aubin Mukoni**, *AFP* Goma photographer **Héritier Baraka Munyampfura**, and *Anadolu* news agency correspondent **Augustin Wamenya** – were arrested by the FARDC, while reporting on displaced persons in Saké, a town in Masisi territory, which is part of Nord-Kivu province.

Although they had reported their presence to the government forces, they were accused of being in an operational zone without the army's permission. They were then accused of providing information to M23 and of being spies for Rwanda, a treason charge carrying a possible death sentence. Matungulu was released on 5 February, the others were released the next day and the charges were finally dropped on 8 February.

"We denounce all these attacks on the media in the strongest possible terms because they only serve to amplify the conflict, and we call on political leaders in the DRC and Rwanda to intercede to end this war on press freedom," JED secretary-general Tshivis Tshivuadi said.

The state of the conflict is now off-limits for Congolese media. On 9 March, defence minister Gilbert Kabanda brought a complaint against **Stanis Bujakera**, a reporter for the news website *Actualite.cd*, the French news magazine *Jeune Afrique* and the *Reuters* news agency, accusing him of spreading rumours liable to "demoralise FARDC troops." Bujakera had simply tweeted an extract from a ministerial cabinet report on M23's progress on the ground. Demoralising the armed forces via the media in time of war is punishable by death. The complaint was finally withdrawn on 12 March at media and communication minister Patrick Muyaya's instigation.

Journalists are often also subjected to physical violence. On 11 March, during a peaceful demonstration that opposition parties organised in the northeastern town of Kasindi to denounce the conflict between the DRC and Rwanda, two journalists were beaten up and then taken in a police car and dropped off on a dangerous road known to be frequented by Islamist rebels of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

Mounting diplomatic tension

These cases illustrate the escalation in threats to journalists as diplomatic tensions mount between Rwanda and the DRC. At the beginning of February, the CSAC suspended the broadcasting of all Rwandan satellite TV channels for 90 days, accusing them of "disinformation, inciting civil disobedience and general insurrection against the DRC public authorities, systematically denigrating national institutions and their representatives, and justifying war." The CSAC said the suspension was a response to the jamming of several Congolese TV channels in Rwanda.