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Africa - DRC

One-sided information

Concern about M23's news control after Goma takeover

21 November 2012

Reporters Without Borders (RWB) and Journalist in Danger (JED) are deeply worried by the measures that the M23 rebel movement took with the news media after seizing Goma, the capital of the eastern province of Nord Kivu, yesterday.

Aware of the scale of violence against civilians in general, the two NGOs are also very concerned about the safety of media personnel in Goma and other parts of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

"Since occupying Goma, the rebels of the 23 March Movement (M23) have seized control of the news media and are behaving as if they were media executives and editors," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said. "We remind them that it is not their job to decide the content of the news reports that the media carry."

Journalist in Danger secretary-general Tshivis Tshivuadi added: "Goma's population has had no access to news reports from the country's capital since yesterday. Instead of trying to control the news and crush media pluralism by allowing only their own voice to be heard, M23 should guarantee the media's right to work safely and with complete independence."

Without any warning, the M23 rebels ordered the suspension of local retransmission of three TV stations broadcasting from the capital, Kinshasa, local sources said.

The signals of the three stations – state-owned *Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise (RTNC)* and two privately-owned pro-government stations, *Digital Congo* and *Radio Télévision du Groupe l'Avenir (RTG@)* – were disconnected at around 2 p.m. yesterday on verbal instructions from M23 spokesman Vianney Kazarama.

The same sources said that, after the rebel takeover, the M23 spokesman personally went to Mount Goma – where the antennae of local radio and TV stations and the relay antennae of the national and international broadcast media are located – and told a representative of the National Network of Satellite Telecommunications (RENATELSAT) to disconnect these three TV stations.

The signals of the international broadcast media and *Raga*, a privately-owned TV station based in Kinshasa that relays *Voice of America*, were not however disconnected.

A local journalist told JED that all the local media have received strict instructions not to relay information coming from the government in Kinshasa. "The M23 asked the provincial *RTNC* station to broadcast only information that helps the public to understand its ideology, and asked the privately-owned media to help the movement establish itself," the source said.

RWB and JED strongly condemn this grave violation of media freedom and urge the armed movement's leaders to fully rescind this measure without delay in order to allow the public to have access to a pluralized and diverse range of news and opinion.

The United Nations Security Council has unanimously approved a resolution (Resolution 2076) firmly condemning M23's human rights violations, calling on M23 to withdraw from Goma and lay down its arms, and calling for the DRC's territorial integrity to be respected.

Photo : Spokesman of the M23 rebel group Lieutenant-Colonel Vianney Kazarama addresses a crowd at the Volcanoes Stadium in Goma, in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on November 21, 2012. AFP PHOTO / PHIL MOORE

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