

# RSF calls on ECOWAS to react to media shutdowns in Guinea

**Reporters Without Borders (RSF) condemns the Guinean government's illegal decision to strip six privately-owned independent broadcasters – four radio stations and two TV channels – of their operating licences, despite earlier pledges. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) must press the Guinean authorities to stop censoring the media, RSF says.**

Information and communication minister Fana Soumah took this draconian decision two months after a meeting with RSF representatives in Conakry at which he condemned the jamming of four popular radio stations and promised to resolve the crisis with the media by means of dialogue.

A sudden decree signed by the minister on 21 May rescinded the operating licences of *Djoma TV*, *Djoma FM*, *Espace FM*, *Espace TV*, *Sweet FM* and *FIM FM*. The next day, the telecommunications regulator – the Post and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (ARPT) – notified the six media outlets in writing that their frequencies were being withdrawn and ordered them to dismantle their transmitters.

It was the ARPT that was presumed to have been responsible for [jamming](#) the signals of four radio stations – *Espace FM*, *Djoma FM*, *FIM FM* and *Évasion FM* – since the end of November. *Espace TV*, *Djoma TV* and *Évasion TV* were meanwhile [withdrawn](#) from the *Canal+* and *StarTimes* satellite TV distribution packages in December by the media regulator, the High Authority for Communication (HAC), on “national security” grounds, and had remained unavailable ever since.

Defending the latest measures in a [press release](#) on 24 May, the government claimed that “*certain media outlets are failing in their responsibilities by not complying with the laws on press freedom, the HAC and the Code of Good Conduct for Journalists.*” The censored outlets, which are owned by three of Guinea’s biggest commercial media groups, are all outspoken and critical in their reporting.

The three media groups filed an appeal with the information and communication ministry on 4 June for the decision to be annulled. They also asked the HAC to intervene the same day. No response has so far been received.

In a statement on 12 June, two HAC members claimed that the media outlets had received money “*from the hands of [Interim President] Mamady Doumbouya himself*” to support Guinea’s military junta and that the reason for their closure was their failure to respect this contract. The heads of the three media groups [described](#) the claim as “defamatory” and the two HAC members have been suspended until further notice.

*It is clear that by shrinking the country's media landscape, the authorities have moved in the opposite direction to that which they had announced. The effect of silencing of many media outlets is dramatic, both for the journalists and for the public, who have been deprived of their right to diverse sources of news and information. As the authorities have turned a deaf ear, we appeal to ECOWAS to react and to call on the authorities to stop persecuting the media concerned and to protect journalism in Guinea. We also call for the protection of the media managers and media workers who are currently subjected to serious threats.*

Sadibou Marong

Director of RSF’s Sub-Saharan Africa bureau

**Decisions in breach of the law**

The decree issued on 21 May violates the HAC organic law, which says that “*the Ministry of Information and Communication withdraws approval after referral to the HAC*” and that “*the HAC takes the decision on withdrawing frequencies from broadcast media.*” RSF has learned that there is no evidence that the withdrawal of frequencies was referred to the HAC or that the HAC approved them.

When questioned by RSF, the information and communication minister insisted that the HAC had been consulted and told RSF to confirm this with the HAC’s president, Boubacar Yacine Diallo. However, Diallo simply told RSF to “*be satisfied with the minister’s response.*”

The ARPT’s letters announcing the withdrawal of frequencies are also invalid. The law on telecommunications and information technology says the withdrawal of a licence or permit is “*issued by the ministry in charge of telecommunications in response to a proposal or after consultation with the Regulatory Authority,*” and that the licence or permit holder is “*notified in writing at least six months for the licence and three months for the permit before its effective date.*” However, the withdrawal was in this case immediate. Finally, nowhere is it said that non-compliance with broadcast content specifications – a very vague condition – constitutes grounds for withdrawing a licence.

The Union of Private Press Professionals (SPPG) says the decree has resulted in the [loss](#) of more than 700 jobs. The Groupe Fréquence Médias (GFM) – the company that owns *FIM FM* – has [organised](#) a campaign to raise funds for its employees who have been put out of work.

### Threats against journalists

In this climate of hostility towards the media, some media professionals are being subjected to specific threats. SPPG general secretary Sékou Jamal Pendessa – who was previously detained for more than a month for trying to defend the right to information in the face of the [restrictions](#) being imposed on the media – [told RSF](#) that unidentified individuals have been following him. On the weekend of 8 June, sources warned him that four people had been “*sent to kidnap him.*” Pendessa also receives calls telling him to “*take steps to avoid the worst.*”

*FIM FM* deputy director **Ibrahima Sory Lincoln Soumah** told RSF that he was followed by two motorcyclists as he returned from a meeting. One of them specifically threatened him, saying: “*We are watching you, we are going to shoot you.*”

*Espace FM* director **Mohamed Mara** is also being targeted. He told RSF that an anonymous caller told a member of his family that he was dead, and that a photo montage circulating on social media reported that he had been abducted. **Tamba Zacharie Millimono**, the advertising manager of *Espace FM* and *TV* and, at the same time, moderator and columnist on the flagship show “Les Grandes Gueules,” has also received death threats in two calls.