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Africa - Nigeria

Journey into fear

Daily abuses suffered by Nigeria's journalists

7 May 2012

Following World Press Freedom Day on May 3, Reporters Without Borders takes a look at the breaches of freedom of news and information in Nigeria during the first quarter of 2012, turning the spotlight on one of the most dangerous countries in Africa for journalists. For the first time, it has included the Islamist militia Boko Haram in its latest [list of Predators of Freedom of Information](#), just published.

The press freedom organization outlines all breaches of freedom of information recorded between 24 December and 24 March. It highlights the almost daily arrests and assault of journalists and the obstruction of access to, and distribution of, information, and describes the insidious atmosphere in which journalists have to carry out their work.

During the period in question, Reporters Without Borders recorded: the murder of one journalist, the killing of another with no proof that it was linked to the victim's work, nine assaults, seven arrests, three journalists threatened, four instances of seizure of equipment or deletion of files, three cases of access to information being cut off, three court cases against journalists and news organisations, the closure of a press centre and a media outlet's premises vandalised.

The report also covers disturbances in April when there were [bomb attacks on the offices of two newspapers, in Abuja and Kaduna](#).

Whether these abuses – obstruction of information and control of the government's image, or gratuitous violence and threats – were carried out by the government or private organizations using armed groups, they confirm the authorities' desire to silence journalists who try to report on the instability now gripping the country.

Nigeria embodies a paradox. On the one hand, it is a country where freedom of news and information is effective so far as the pluralism and vitality of the media are concerned, and on the other, it has one of Africa's worst records for infringements of press freedom and a worrying level of danger for journalists.

Murder, threats and violence

Since 14 March, when it became known that talks were taking place between Boko Haram and the government, the freelance journalist **Ahmad Salkida** has received several anonymous telephone threats. The reporter, who has covered the activities of Boko Haram for several years, was accused among other things of being a member of the Islamist group and of being the instigator of the talks. He was also told that he and the group "are not supposed to exist". The next day, he was followed by a white Lagos-registered 4x4 for several hours in Abuja.

In July last year he was forced to move away from the northern city of Maiduguri after receiving threats from people claiming to belong to Boko Haram. The threats followed the publication in the

magazine *Blueprint* of an article he wrote on the Islamist group's first suicide bomber.

On 11 March, Boko Haram threatened to take action against three newspapers, *National Accord*, *Vanguard* and *Tribune*, in a tele-conference in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state. The group said the newspapers attributed statements to the group which were not made by its members and showed bias against it in their reports. It said they portrayed the group in a negative light while praising government forces.

On 9 March, Boko Haram had threatened to "take care of" any journalist that misrepresented its views in an article. The *Nigerian Tribune* and *Vanguard Newspapers* were among those mentioned specifically by the group's spokesman, Abul Qaqa.

On 13 February, six journalists from the *New Nigerian*, *Blueprint*, *Aminiya*, *Voice of Nigeria*, *Hausa Service* and the *Nigerian Standard*, and a *Nigerian Television Authority* cameraman were attacked by a dozen unidentified assailants in Katami village in the Silame local government area of Sokoto State, where they were covering the election campaign of the All Nigeria Peoples Party's candidate for the state governorship, Alhaji Yusha'u Ahmed. The bus in which they were travelling was attacked by men armed with machetes, knives, cutlasses and sticks.

On 7 February, **Akinola Ariyo**, a photojournalist for the *New Nigerian*, was threatened by an officer who aimed his weapon at him and ordered him to leave while he was accompanying a group of people trying to negotiate the reopening of the press centre at Murtala Mohammed airport in Lagos, closed by the airport authorities in early February.

On 1 February, three security guards assaulted **Hassan Adebayo**, marketing executive with the Port Harcourt newspaper *Daily Trust* and **Sani Musa**, the driver of the company's distribution vehicle, as the pair were delivering copies of that day's edition to vendors in the area. The attackers, in a white Toyota Hilux with the registration number RV 96 AO1, first attacked the driver, who managed to escape, then vandalised the vehicle, smashing its side mirrors.

On 20 January, **Enenche Godwin Akogwu**, 31, the Kano correspondent of *Channels TV*, was shot dead while trying to cover Boko Haram suicide bombings, which killed at least 185 people earlier that day. The journalist was interviewing victims outside the Farm central police station, which was a target of one of the attacks, when an unidentified gunman fired several shots at him.

The body of radio reporter **Nansok Silas**, who worked for *Highland FM*, was found on 19 January in a stream under a bridge on the Zaramagada-Rayfield road, 200 metres from a military checkpoint, in Jos, northeast of Abuja. Nothing of value was taken from him and colleagues suspect he was the victim of a targeted murder, but the cause of death and possible motive are still unknown.

Originally from the Langtang North area in Plateau state, he had worked for *Highland FM* for three years and hosted a programme called "Highland Profile". He had not received any threats. Reporters Without Borders has called on the authorities to carry out a thorough investigation and to do their utmost to shed light on his death, and to consider the possibility that it was linked to his work.

On 3 January, the Kano office of the *Daily Trust* was invaded by vandals who tried to smash up the premises and assault staff. Only one person involved in the failed attempt was arrested. He was charged with criminal conspiracy, assault, criminal trespass and mischief by fire. **Obstructing access to information and controlling the state's image**

There was glaring evidence during the first quarter of 2012 of the Nigerian authorities' desire to control the country's image and monitor what the media publish or broadcast.

The government demonstrated its resolve to hide the real extent of the population's demonstrations of dissatisfaction, as well as the threat presented by Boko Haram.

It seems as if the obstruction of access to information, seizures of newspaper print runs and equipment, as well as threats and lawsuits against journalists are aimed at allowing the

government to play down its own weakness and the difficulties faced by the country,

On 13 March, police and troops manhandled several journalists covering a visit to Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, by the first lady, Patience Jonathan. **Dare Fasuba**, of *The Vanguard*, **Akinwale Aboluade** of *The Punch*, **Gbenro Adesina** of *The News/PM NEWS*, and **Sola Adeyemo** of *Compass Newspapers* were prevented from entering Lekan Salami Stadium, while others such as **Bisi Oladele** of *The Nation* were beaten when they tried to exercise their right to cover the event.

A few days earlier, **Jude Obiemenyego**, a journalist with the newspaper *Zion Nationale*, was arrested by an officer of the State Security Service, for having exposed a case of corruption involving the ex-wife of the former government of Delta State. He was arrested in the woman's office and threatened with a gun before being taken to police headquarters where he was held for several days. Since his release, he has received telephone death threats from unidentified callers.

On 7 March, an unidentified journalist was assaulted by police officers deployed to break up protests by youths at the Stubb Creek oilfield in the southern state of Akwa Ibom. The journalist fled to escape further violence.

On 23 February, **Misbahu Bashir**, a reporter for the *Daily Trust*, was refused access to the headquarters of the Aguryi Ironsi brigade in Abuja and was forced to stay in his car for three hours by soldiers outside the building. The journalist was seeking information about the arrest by brigade troops of 99 passengers travelling in a truck that had been stopped on the Kaduna-Abuja highway.

He said he was detained after asking to see the brigade commander instead of the public relations officer, a captain, with whom he had originally requested a meeting.

The reporter was allowed to leave after he was made to write down his name, address and vehicle registration number.

On 18 February, **Iyatse Joshua**, of the radio station *City FM*, was arrested by Lagos police while he was covering a procession organized by human rights activists and organizations in remembrance of those killed by security forces during the week-long nationwide strike and mass protest against the abolition in January of fuel subsidies. He and a number of activists were taken to the offices of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. All were released several hours later on the orders of the chief of police.

On 14 February, **Suleiman Isah**, a reporter with the *Daily Champion*, was barred from entering the Niger State government headquarters by members of the State Security Service, despite having appropriate accreditation. The security officers threatened him before he was allowed to leave the premises.

Earlier, a *Voice of America* reporter was manhandled by security men in similar circumstances outside the Justice Idris Legbo Conference Centre, a few metres from the government building.

On 13 February, journalists from *The Nation*, *ThisDay*, *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *Nigerian Tribune* were forced to leave by soldiers posted at the entrance to a hospital next door to the government headquarters in the northern city of Kaduna. They were reporting on an attack by some of the governor's guards on an information ministry official, whom they mistook for a member of Boko Haram.

On 9 February, **Isa Sa'idu**, the Kaduna bureau chief of the *Daily Trust*, was threatened by Lieutenant-Colonel Abubakar Edun, spokesman of the army's First Mechanised Division, for having reported that soldiers had manhandled journalists trying to cover the bombing of a division barracks in Kaduna on 7 February. His equipment was seized.

On the same day at the same location, **Umar Uthman** a cameraman with the private station *African Independent Television* and a colleague from government-run *Katuna State Television* both had their cameras confiscated.

On 7 February, agents of the State Security Service raided the offices of the Nigerian Television Authority in Abuja in search of video recordings that showed members of Boko Haram nominated to take part in talks with the government. The cassettes were taken away by the agents, who said they were acting on government orders.

On 5 February, the French journalist **Jérémie Drieu**, a reporter for the channel *TF1*, and a local colleague **Ahmad Salkida**, were arrested by soldiers in the city of Jos in Plateau State. They were forced to show all the material they had filmed before being forced to pack and leave the state at nightfall. They were apprehended when it emerged that a documentary on which they were working would be critical of the government.

On 4 February, the press centre at Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos, opened 30 years ago, was closed by the Nigerian authorities on the orders of the head of the protocol department attached to the airport's presidential wing, Alobabi Oduniyi. He was reported to have accused journalists accredited to the centre of writing articles that were negative and prejudicial to the interests of the president. More than 60 journalists have been prevented from recovering their equipment locked inside the centre.

Martins Ayola, general director of the station *Adaba FM*, which broadcasts in Ondo State, said there was a price on the head of some of its senior staff for broadcasting critical programmes and they were being hunted by contract killers. One of the station's programmes, 'Oja-Oro', was ordered off air by the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation for allegedly trying to turn listeners against the governor, Olusegun Mimiko.

On 1 February, Kayode Akinmade, the commissioner for information and strategy, launched a petition against the programme that succeeded 'Oja-Oro', entitled "Ela Oro", alleging it was broadcasting negative perceptions of the government.

Also on 1 February, **Goke Famadewa**, a journalist for *The Punch* newspaper, was manhandled by police attached to the Lagos office of Shell Nigeria. The journalist, who was reporting on a dispute inside the company, was beaten up for taking photographs of the premises. The police officers deleted all his photos before releasing him after two hours.

On 25 January, newspaper vendors **Okwudili Nnadi**, **Tochukwu Onuigbo**, **Ugwu Stephen** and **Martha Agbede** – who had her five-month-old baby with her – were arrested by state police in Nsukka, in Enugu state. All copies of newspapers in their possession were seized based on the argument that they stirred up popular unrest because they contained photos of the victims of Boko Haram attacks. They were released after several hours but they were unable to recover the confiscated copies.

Again on 25 January, **Stanley Mijah**, a journalist for *The Scope* published in Adamawa State, was indicted by a court in Yola for having in his possession sensitive articles which, if published, might disturb public order.

Abdullahi Adamu Kanoma, a journalist with *Zamfara State Radio*, was charged with criminal conspiracy, inciting public disturbance, illegal assembly and mischief by fire. He was arrested while on his way to the police headquarters to interview the commissioner after the fuel price protests of recent months. He was approached by police officers and told his name was a list of people to be arrested for taking part in the marches. His trial began on 6 February before the Zamfara State Sharia court.

Problems persist in April, two more suspicious deaths Before April ended with the twin newspaper bombings in Abuja and Kaduna, there were two suspicious deaths of journalists. Reporters Without Borders is unable to determine whether they were linked to the victims' work.

On 16 April, **Chuks Ogu**, a journalist with the station *Independent Television*, was shot dead by a gunman who burst into the apartment of a couple whose wedding he had been filming and opened fire. The circumstances of the murder are still unclear and it is not known whether the journalist was the target or simply an innocent victim.

On 3 April, the body of **Ibrahim Muhammed**, a film editor with the commercial TV station *African Independent Television*, was found in a pool of blood in his apartment in Kaduna. According to his family, he had been followed home on two occasions by unidentified people. An investigation was opened on 4 April, but there have been no serious efforts to find those responsible.

Photo: Newspapers' readers in Kano, Northern Nigeria (AFP/Seyllou Diallo)

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