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2015 Scores

Press Status: Not Free

Press Freedom Score (0 = best, 100 = worst): 64

Legal Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 19

Political Environment (0 = best, 40 = worst): 28

Economic Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 17

Although Guinea avoided a repetition of the previous year's political violence in 2014, the media environment suffered from the effects of an Ebola outbreak that also struck neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone. Authorities struggled to balance a professed commitment to free expression against a desire to prevent panic as the epidemic gained momentum. A journalist and two media workers were among several people killed in a remote part of southeastern Guinea during a visit by a medical team attempting to alert villagers to the dangers of Ebola. Although the attack was attributed to fear and confusion on the part of the local people, the army subsequently prevented a group of journalists and lawyers from investigating the killings.

Legal Environment

Constitutional and legislative reforms enacted in 2010 improved the legal environment for the press, but some measures remained unimplemented, and prospects for achieving genuine press freedom are tenuous. Defamation against the head of state, members of parliament, the military, and other government institutions is a criminal offense subject to high fines, as is reporting falsehoods. A law on access to information was adopted in 2010, but it has never been effectively enforced, reportedly as a result of bureaucratic delays, procedural errors, and resistance on the part of government employees who are reluctant to disclose their offices' information.

The appointment of Alhousseine Makanera as the new minister of communications in January 2014 elicited some hope for progressive change. Shortly after his nomination, Makanera announced that he would cooperate with all journalists regardless of their affiliation and promised an end to state abuses. Speaking at a press conference in November, however, President Alpha Condé made bluntly dismissive remarks about the international press freedom group Reporters Without Borders, the media in general, and human rights concerns.

The media regulatory body, the National Communication Council (CNC), is mandated to support equal treatment and foster a diversity of views in the media sphere. In practice, the CNC has

periodically taken punitive measures against media outlets that do not support Condé's government. In 2014, the council stated that responsibility for media affairs would pass to a new body, the High Authority for Communications (HAC), as mandated by the 2010 media law. However, neither an HAC nor the supervisory body intended to oversee the transition process had been established by year's end.

Political Environment

The government occasionally attempts to censor content that it finds overly critical. In August 2014, authorities threatened to close down two popular outlets, the television station Espace TV and the radio station Espace FM. The government claimed that both were operating without a license, but their representatives stated that they had been repeatedly ignored by regulators when they attempted to complete the licensing procedures. The stations are known for their frequent investigations into official corruption. At year's end Espace FM remained on the air, while Espace TV was unable to broadcast domestically, though it was accessible via satellite.

There were a number of reports of harassment and violence directed against journalists in 2014. In July, the editor of the newspaper *Le Fouineur* was attacked by police while he was investigating the eviction of a family from the Coléah Lanséboundji neighborhood in Conakry. In November, a radio journalist in Labe was threatened and had his equipment damaged by a local businessman who objected to a recent broadcast.

The year's most violent incident occurred in September, when residents of Womey, a village near the initial site of the Ebola outbreak, killed a journalist and two media workers along with at least five other people – including health workers and state officials – who were attempting to visit the community as part of a public awareness campaign. Fear surrounding the Ebola virus apparently exacerbated the villagers' suspicion of outsiders, leading to the murders. A group of lawyers and journalists attempted to travel to the village in October to investigate the killings, but they were prevented from proceeding by the army, which seized their equipment and deleted files.

Economic Environment

Media laws passed in 2010 guarantee the freedom to open a newspaper, but in practice, economic difficulties present large obstacles. Because production costs are high, newspapers struggle to secure printing equipment and distribute a significant number of copies. The typical newspaper has a circulation of only a few thousand and does not publish with any regularity. A number of private publications, mostly weeklies, are published in Conakry and present a diversity of views, though distribution outside the capital is unreliable. The only daily newspaper, *Horoya*, is state owned and avoids criticism of the government; even this paper has struggled to maintain its production schedule due to outdated equipment.

In a country with high illiteracy rates, radio is the dominant medium. The public broadcaster Radio Télévision Guinéenne (RTG) operates radio and television stations with programming in French, English, and a number of local languages. Numerous private radio stations operate throughout Guinea. Many citizens listen regularly to foreign programming on FM and shortwave radio. The government does not restrict access to or distribution of foreign television content via satellite and cable, though few citizens can afford these services. There are no government restrictions on access to the internet, which is gaining some importance as a platform for dissent, including through sites managed by the diaspora community such as GuineeConakry.info. However, inside the country, internet penetration remains very low at only around 1.7 percent in 2014.

Newspapers have difficulty securing enough advertising revenue to cover their costs, but since 1996 the government has provided increasing subsidies for both print and online media outlets of

all political allegiances. Some critics have said that these subsidies are insufficient, irregularly allocated, and often poorly managed by the recipients. Some local newspapers and broadcast outlets are thought to be controlled by political or business interests. Low pay for journalists has led to unethical practices, such as accepting bribes to suppress unflattering stories.

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