

# Reports of Malian news portal censored by government

There have been reports that Malian news site, Maliactu, based in Paris has been threatened by Mali's government after posting an Associated Press (AP) story today implicating Malian soldiers in extrajudicial killings.



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The editor of the news portal, Segar Diarra, told AP he received two separate phone calls and an email from Mali's defense and communications ministries saying that they would block his website in Mali if the AP story was not withdrawn.

"I was forced to take down the article," Diarra told AP in an interview. "I judged that the blocking of my website in Mali was a repercussion that would be even more negative for my publication than taking down the article."

## Unaware of censorship orders

Reached by CPJ, Army Col. Diarra Koné and Army Lt. Col. Souleymane Maïga, two spokesmen for Mali's defense ministry, said they were unaware of any censorship orders.

"Personally, I have never asked anyone to remove information from a website," Maïga told CPJ.

The findings of the six-month AP investigation, first distributed by the news agency on 8 December, document reprisal killings of ethnic Arab residents of Timbuktu after French and Malian forces liberated the northern town from the grip of Al-Qaeda-linked militants in January.

## Story details

The AP story details its discovery of the bodies of six Arab residents of Timbuktu in the Sahara desert outside the town. It contains eyewitness accounts alleging the victims were kidnapped by a Malian army unit. Malian authorities have consistently denied involvement in the killings, according to the AP report.

Local and international journalists who have reported critically about Mali's military have faced arbitrary detentions, imprisonment, intimidation, and censorship, according to CPJ research. In April, the Malian army expelled French journalist

Dorothée Thiénot from the city of Gao after she published an article that cited claims by anonymous local residents that Malian soldiers were killing real or perceived Islamist insurgents and their accomplices.

## **History of censoring and intimidating journalists**

"The Malian army has a history of censoring and intimidating journalists who scrutinize its activities," said CPJ Africa Advocacy coordinator Mohamed Keita. "We urge authorities to investigate the allegations of intimidation against Maliactu and issue a clear public message that journalists and news outlets can do their work without fear of reprisal."

Saouti Labass Haïdara, editor of the private newspaper L'Indépendant, which is printed in Bamako, Mali's capital, but has no website of its own, told CPJ that his newspaper republished the AP investigation in today's edition without problem.

CPJ could not immediately establish that any other Malian websites had posted the AP story. Local journalists said the government may have been unnerved at the appearance of the story on a popular Malian news aggregation site, which reaches a much larger audience abroad.

Source: CPJ via APO

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