

S. Sudan bans journalists from interviewing rebels

JUBA: South Sudan's government on Monday threatened to silence journalists if they broadcast interviews with rebels involved in the civil war.



"We are shutting you media houses down if you interview any rebel here to disseminate his or her plans and policies within South Sudan," Information Minister Michael Makuei told reporters. His comments came after a local radio station broadcast an interview with a top opposition leader.

"If you can go as far as interviewing the rebels to come and disseminate their filthy ideas to the people and poison their minds, that is negative agitation," he said. "You either join them, or else we put you where you will not be talking," Makuei said in the latest threat to press freedom in the world's newest state.

Rights groups have repeatedly warned that security forces have cracked down on journalists, suffocating debate on how to end a civil war in which tens of thousands of people have been killed in the past 14 months.

Reporters Without Borders this month said South Sudan had slipped down six places on its annual press freedom rankings, listing it as the 125th worst nation out of 180. It said the war has "hit media freedom hard," noting that "news outlets were warned not to cover security issues and journalists were unable to work properly because of the war".

Fighting broke out in December 2013 when President Salva Kiir accused his former deputy Riek Machar of attempting a coup, setting off a cycle of retaliatory killings across the country. War continues despite numerous ceasefire deals.

Over half the country's 12 million people need aid, according to the United Nations, which is also sheltering some 100,000 civilians trapped inside camps ringed with barbed wire, too terrified to venture out for fear of being killed.

Source: AFP via I-NET Bridge