

Two radio stations shut down in DRC

NEW YORK: The Committee to Protect Journalists has called on authorities in the south-eastern Congolese city of Likasi to allow two private stations to return to the air. On 11, March 2009, the mayor of Likasi, Denis Kalondji Ngoy, ordered the closure of Radio Communautaire du Katanga (RCK) and Radiotélévision Likasi 4 (RTL4) in connection with their coverage of a local strike, according to local press freedom group Journaliste en Danger (JED).

The orders, which were backed by an official notice from provincial Communications and Interior Minister Dikanga Kazadi, occurred during a tense social crisis in Likasi, with increasing inflation and an ongoing strike by national railway workers, who were demanding 36 months in back pay, according to local journalists. Local authorities accused the stations of inciting the public to strike and of broadcasting defamatory statements, according to JED.

Polydor Muboyayi, president of the Congolese Observatory of Congolese Media, told CPJ that closing the stations was illegal since the High Authority on Media, the official media regulator, has the exclusive authority to shut down media outlets.

"We are concerned that authorities overstepped their authority in summarily closing these stations," said CPJ's deputy director, Robert Mahoney. "We call on authorities in Likasi to immediately reopen RCK and RTL4."

RCK presenter Paul Kabamba told CPJ his station was officially accused of broadcasting an old speech by Patrice Emery Lumumba, the first prime minister of the independent DRC, and two songs, "Que demande le peuple" (What do the people want?) and "Binashindakana" ("It has become impossible"). RTL4 presenter Charles de Gaulle Kaboulo told CPJ his station was accused of falsely reporting fatalities in clashes between police and demonstrators on 7 March. RTL4 journalists denied the accusations, they told CPJ.

On 31 March, RTL4 director Jacob Nshimbi went to Lubumbashi, the capital of Katanga province, to discuss the stations' ban with the provincial Minister of Communication. Kaboulo said they had received no indication that the stations would be reopened.

Journalists from these independent outlets have been harassed in recent years for their local coverage. In 2007, RCK presenter Paul Kabanga was arrested over a broadcast alleging that vehicles belonging to Likasi's magistrates lacked license plates and insurance documents required by law. He was released without charge three days later after the intervention of the Congolese press union.

In a separate incident, on 28 February, several local journalists told CPJ that Likasi Mayor Ngoy threatened presenter Gilbert Nawesi of Christian station Radio Plein Evangile over commentary on his daily call-in program. The mayor allegedly summoned the journalist to his office and told him to stop broadcasting immediately and that he would be held responsible, or even killed, if an ethnic conflict erupted, Nawesi said. The mayor's personal secretary told CPJ today that no threat had

been made.

On his program, Nawesi had suggested that it would be good to return to a policy of ex-dictator Mobutu Sese Seko that required public servants to serve outside their native province. Nawesi told CPJ that the mayor said he had been receiving complaints that the journalist was offending citizens by suggesting that they were incompetent to govern their own city. In an email to CPJ, Nawesi said he is still waiting for the mayor to make a statement that would allow him to return to the air.

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