

Two TV reporters arrested as "rebels" in Abidjan

ABIDJAN: Reporters Without Borders has called for the immediate release of two journalists employed by Télévision Notre Patrie (TVNP) - a pirate TV station based in the northern city of Bouaké that supports the former rebel New Force - who were arrested on their arrival in Abidjan late last week.



The two journalists, Sanogo Aboubakar aka Abou Sanogo and Kangbé Yayoro Charles Lopez aka Gnahoré Charly, had wanted to do a series of reports at the Golf Hotel, where presidential contender Alassane Ouattara is holed up. Accused of being rebels, they are being held at the gendarmerie's criminal investigation department in the Abidjan district of Plateau.

Reporters Without Borders has condemned the false accusations being made against them. They did not go to Abidjan for the purpose of criminal activity. They went as journalists representing a TV station that happens to be siding with Ouattara in his dispute over the result of last November's presidential election with the incumbent, Laurent Gbagbo.

Denounces biased media

The press freedom organisation has also denounced the way that state-owned Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne and the pro-Gbagbo print media have been portraying the two journalists as rebels who had come to Abidjan to participate in an armed attack.

Sanogo and Charly left Bouaké for Abidjan at about 3pm on 28 January aboard a flight operated by the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI). They were arrested on their arrival at the Abidjan air base by members of the Defence and Security Forces (FDS).

Media harassed

Two months after a dispute over the result of the second round of the presidential election on 28 November triggered a still unresolved political crisis, there has been little improvement in the situation for either Ivorian or foreign journalists. Local reporters say they are being harassed by both sides.

Tiburce Koffi, a contributor to *Le Nouveau Réveil*, a newspaper that supports former President Henri Konan Bédié, and Venance Konan, a correspondent of *Afrique Magazine*, both recently fled Côte d'Ivoire claiming they had been threatened by Gbagbo supporters.

At the same time, Silué Kanigui, who is said to have been a correspondent in the northern town of Korhogo for the pro-Gbagbo daily *Notre Voie*, claims that he had to flee to Abidjan for safety reasons.

Referring to Kanigui, *Notre Voie* editor César Etou told Reporters Without Borders: "He is not the only one in this situation. All the journalists in the north who were not members of the [pro-Ouattara] RHDP have been forced to flee."

Etou is on the list of people targeted for sanctions by the European Union.

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