

## Cameroonian security agents detain two journalists

NEW YORK: Security agents in Cameroon have detained two journalists since Friday, 5 February 2010, in an apparent effort to learn the source of a purported memo from the chairman of the state oil company about the purchase of a luxury boat, according to local journalists and news reports.

Agents of Cameroon's Directorate-General of External Intelligence (known by its French acronym as DGE) took reporter Simon Hervé Nko'o of the weekly *Bebela* into custody after searching his home, according to news reports. Another journalist, Serge Sabouang, editor of the bi-monthly *La Nation*, has also been held at the agency's headquarters in the capital, Yaoundé.

*La Nation* and other news outlets have raised questions in recent weeks about the boat purchase, based on a purported June 2008 memorandum from Laurent Esso, board chairman of the state-run oil company SNH. The memo purportedly directs a subordinate to disburse a total of 1.3 billion CFA francs in "commissions" to three officials who were involved in the boat's purchase, according to local journalists. *Bebela*'s Nko'o was investigating the memo but had not yet written a story, according to editor-in-chief Joseph Olinga.

DGE interrogated two other journalists, editors Bibi Ngota of *Cameroun Express* and Robert Mintya of *L'Espresso*, on Friday, according to news reports. Ngota has since gone into hiding, according to local journalists. Security agents seized documents from Mintya's home, according to local journalists. Mintya has sent interview questions to Esso and SNH administrator director general Adolphe Moudiki in preparation for a story, they said.

Neither Esso nor any other SNH official has publicly commented on reports describing the memo. Communications Minister Issa Tchiroma Bakary did not return CPJ's call for comment. In addition to his oil company position, Esso holds the high-ranking administration jobs of minister of state and secretary-general of the presidency. The boat, the type and cost of which were not immediately clear, was purchased with the intention of entertaining potential investors, according to news reports.

"We are alarmed by the detention of Simon Hervé Nko'o and Serge Sabouang in what appears to be an attempt to intimidate journalists into revealing confidential sources," CPJ Africa program coordinator Tom Rhodes said. "We call on the authorities to release them immediately."

Nko'o and Sabouang are the latest journalists to be arrested by security agents without a warrant. Editor Jean Bosco Talla of the weekly *Germinal* was similarly jailed in December 2009 on charges of insulting the president.

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