

HE Umara Musa Yar'Adua
President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
Presidential Palace, Abuja

Paris, 1 July 2009

Dear Mr. President,

Reporters Without Borders, an organisation that defends press freedom worldwide, would like to share with you its deep concern about the problems being experienced by journalists in Nigeria.

Our organisation registered 42 press freedom violations in Nigeria in the first half of 2009 and found that, for the most part, police officers or local officials such as provincial governors were responsible. A total of 21 journalists were physically attacked during this period, eight were threatened, five were abducted for several hours, and three were detained for periods of between 24 hours and a week. Three media were censored and one was physically attacked. And there was a string of incidents last week.

In the latest of these incidents, *Freedom Radio* executive vice-chairman **Alhaji Ado Mohamed** was arrested by nine Kano state police officers in the northern city of Kano on 26 June in connection with an article on the Saharareporters website accusing Kano's governor, Malam Ibrahim Shekarau, of being involved in the fatal shooting of Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmoud Adam, a teacher in Koranic studies at the Almontada Mosque in Dorayi, in April 2007.

Mallam Tukur Mamu, the editor of the Kaduna-based weekly *Desert Herald*, went into hiding on 23 June after getting several phone messages that day warning that Kano's governor would "personally take care of you" if he continued to publishing articles that "harm the government's interests." Mamu had also run stories about this murder.

Six journalists were badly beaten by state police on 25 June in Asaba, the capital of the southern Delta state, when they went to cover the demolition of illegal shops. The six journalists are **Obinna Ume** of *African Independent Television*, **Daniel Ayemere** of *Minaj Broadcasting International*, **Aderemi Omotoso** of *Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria*, **Alphonsus Agborh** of the privately-owned *Nigeria Tribune* daily, **Albert Ograka** of the state-owned *Tide* newspaper and **Nkem Nweke** of *DRTV*. Ayemere was hospitalised in a serious condition.

The same day, **Kayode Adeji** of the daily *Next*, **Segun Adeleye** of the *Daily Independent* and **Demola Oni** of the daily *The Punch* were manhandled by the bodyguards of Tunji Egbetokun, the speaker of the state assembly in the southwestern

state of Ogun, when they went to Egbetokun's office for information about a dispute between the assembly and Ogun's governor.

The governor of the southwestern state of Ekiti, Segun Oni, ordered the closure of all the state's radio and TV stations on 19 June after journalists went on strike for better work conditions. As a result of the strike, three employees of the *Broadcasting Corporation of Ekiti State* – **Yemisi Ayokunle** of the Radio and Television Workers Union, **Akinwale Olaoye** of the Nigerian Union of Journalists and **Arije Kemi** of the National Union of Confidential Secretaries of Nigeria – were branded as “trouble-makers” and were transferred to other state jobs. The state's radio and TV stations are reportedly resuming broadcasting after more than a week off the air.

Mr. President, we think you have a duty to react to all these press freedom violations. As guarantor of the constitution and basic freedoms, you must ensure that journalists are able to work in a satisfactory manner throughout Nigeria, without being subjected to threats, physical attacks or judicial harassment.

Your country enjoys a degree of press freedom that was won at great cost but this achievement is under threat from violence and obstructive behaviour.

We urge you, as matter of priority, to demand that state governors stop persecuting journalists who upset them. Section 24 of Chapter III of Nigeria's constitution says the state authorities must respect the principle of free expression. We also urge you to systematically punish police officers who violate journalists' rights.

We are counting on your personal commitment to the need to ensure that the media in Nigeria are able to operate in a more favourable climate.

We trust you will give this matter your careful consideration.

Respectfully,



Jean-François Julliard
Secretary-General