



CÔTE D'IVOIRE Time to “disarm minds, pens and microphones”



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Reporters Without Borders
International Secrétariat
Africa Desk
5, rue Geoffroy Marie
75009 Paris-France
Tél. (33) 1 44 83 84 76
Fax (33) 1 45 23 11 51
Email: africa@rsf.org
Web: www.rsf.org



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warring parties signed in January 2003 near Paris, still awaits implementation. This gave the government of national reconciliation a year "to reinforce the role of the regulatory authorities, guarantee the neutrality and impartiality of the public service and foster the financial independence of the media."

This task is more urgent than ever. The excesses of the Ivorian media were very serious in November and December, following the cease-fire violation by government forces and the "six-day war" between supporters of President Gbagbo and a French peacekeeping force known as the Licorne contingent. Calls for murder were made on the air on *RTI* and the "hunt for whites" was glorified as an act of "anti-colonial resistance." The print media did not lag behind. On 23 September, *Notre Voie* called the rebels "drug addicts and drinkers of blood." On 24 September, *Le Temps* suggested that President Gbagbo could suffer the same fate as Rwanda's president whose plane was shot down in 1994 "by neo-colonialists, with the result we all know today, with the country torn apart, killing fields and genocide."

On 11 October, *Le National Plus* said of President Blaise Compaoré in neighbouring Burkina Faso: "The Ivorian government's special services must urgently cut short the political adventurism of this bad president, who has put on seven-league boots for the French, the ones who put him up to it." The same issue had a report about the deputy rebel leader Louis-André Dakoury Tabley that was headlined, "He raped his victim's wives." It said: "It is reported that, as the victims' throats were being cut by the lawless rebels, he took a malicious pleasure in having his way with their wives." On 15 October, *Le Temps* wrote: "Chirac therefore decided to make war against us and for more than two years has maintained a horde of bloodthirsty rapists and bank-robbers to hold us back in our struggle against poverty."

On 17 November, *Notre Voie* described Africa's presidents as "Chirac's accomplices in his diabolical work." It said: "These presidents have decided to support the rebels. But does that mean they must forget that several thousands of their citizens have always received board and lodging from Côte d'Ivoire and are the ones who enable their own countries to survive thanks to the funds they repatriate with nothing being asked in return. Have they forgotten that if Côte d'Ivoire really has its back to the wall, it could repatriate those thousands of foreigners? Have they really forgotten that Côte d'Ivoire is the locomotive of this region and that, if it breaks down, it could deprive them of their own meagre means of subsistence?" On 7

December, *Le Courrier d'Abidjan* referred to "France, a terrorist country of long standing." A headline in *Le Temps* on 10 March said, "Plan to assassinate Gbagbo in all-out final assault by Licorne" (1).

As a result of their excesses, the Ivorian media are now so discredited they have become scapegoats for the crisis. On 3 March, the daily *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan* quoted national assembly member and presidential adviser Ben Soumahoro as saying, "the real war mongers, the real destroyers of national unity are the Ivorian journalists of all colours, without exception and without distinction." But blaming the press alone for national divisions and the visceral rejection of everything foreign obscures the wider problem of "Ivorianness" and, in rural areas, the glorification of everything "native" (2). And it could pave the way for calls for the lynching of journalists as the ones "responsible for the war," as a listener identifying himself as Lago Lazare proposed in the interactive programme, "Current Issues," on *Radio Côte d'Ivoire* on 4 May 2005. The Press Freedom, Ethics and Conduct Watchdog (OLPED), which has been monitoring the Ivorian media since 1995, "roundly condemned" such comments and warned that they could have "unforeseeable consequences."

It is not just foreigners who have been voicing outrage about the Ivorian media's excesses. People have been speaking out for a long time inside the country. Over the past 10 years, OLPED has issued more than 6,000 official warnings to journalists or newspapers for violating basic rules of conduct – an average of 10 at every weekly meeting. But in the absence of courts capable of sanctioning press offences, these warnings have no effect, like the many warnings coming from abroad. A study showed that in single year, 2000, the daily *Notre Voie* published 52 articles, which "in a law-abiding democracy would have been punishable in the courts for inciting racial hatred" (3).

But is there any hope of the hate media being brought to justice in a country in which thousands of civilians have been the victims of political violence without any judicial response and even the worst massacres and "death squad" atrocities in Abidjan have gone unpunished nationally and internationally? Despite all the public condemnation of political violence in UN resolutions and the reports of various commissions of enquiry, only two cases of killings have been prosecuted – the Yopougon massacre in which the case was finally dismissed and the October 2003 murder of French journalist Jean Hélène for which an Ivorian policeman got a 17-year prison sentence.



Dependence on “those who give orders”

A realistic strategy for emerging from the vicious circle of impunity or at least stemming the worse press offences can only hope to find some support from the press as it exists, not as one would like it to be, especially in the light of the coming elections, which the international community and almost certainly most Ivoirians would like to be held as soon as possible.

In the view of Christian Bouquet, “the progress of the press towards diversity of opinion has followed the same course as the single party towards a multiparty system – the monolith has broken apart but each piece still will not stand for being contradicted” (4). Bouquet continues: “Mentally, we have gone from a government press to a party press with dependence on those who give orders still intact.” The current situation of the Ivorian news media and the way they work confirms Bouquet’s overall assessment but also shows journalists have some room for manoeuvre as regards emancipating themselves from “those who give orders.”

Newspapers are the poor relation of the Ivorian media despite their large number and their editorial virulence. Only two of the 23 daily newspapers existing at the end of 2004 – *Fraternité Matin* and *Soir-Info* – have a print-run of more than 20,000, and only eight of the others print more than 10,000 copies, which is considered the threshold of profitability. The number of copies actually sold is much more modest (5). There are only three newspapers – *Fraternité Matin*, *Soir-Info* and *Notre Voie* (the ruling party daily) – which sell more than 10,000 copies a day. Nine others have fewer than 1,000 paying readers. The rate of copies returned unsold ranges from 25 per cent for *Fraternité Matin* to 95 per cent for *Toujours*, which must be a world record.

Toujours, which printed an average of 18,000 copies a day, folded in February 2005. But there are still 14 other dailies with a rate of unsold copies higher than 50 per cent. To some extent, printing many more copies than are sold helps to lure advertisers and keep advertising tariffs artificially high. But it is self-destructive when four, five or even nine copies are returned for each one sold and can end up putting the newspaper out of business. This is offset by the fact that newspapers are funded by “the ones who gives orders” and some editors earn a small personal income – one not included in the accounting – from the resale of returned

copies for recycling. (6).

Broadly speaking, one can classify the Ivorian newspapers into three categories: the “blue-tops” (blue being the preferred colour of the pro-Gbagbo newspapers), the “G7 newspapers” (named after the group of opposition parties), and the “two-faced” newspapers, so-called because of their fluctuating political loyalties or, to put it more positively, their respect for a degree of diversity of opinion. Paradoxically, the “pro-government” *Fraternité Matin*, which was the official newspaper during the four decades of one-party rule, is considered the leading member of the group of relatively independent newspapers. *Frat’Mat*, as it is often called, inherited significant state resources from the time (in the mid-1980s) when its daily circulation reached 100,000 copies, but now it is burdened by heavy debt (more than 30 times its capital). Nonetheless, it is still considered the flagship of the print media, including from the viewpoint of professional conduct.

A business group that owns two other leading newspapers (*Soir-Info* and *L’Inter*) also strives for relative independence from the politicians by devoting more space in *Soir-Info* to crime and general interest news and, in *L’Inter*, to international news, something that is largely ignored in other newspapers, even when significant events occur in neighbouring countries such as, right now, the turmoil following Gen. Eyadema’s death in Togo. Exacerbated by the civil war, the self-absorption of the Ivorian press is extraordinary and has a hot-house effect that probably helps to distort the Ivorian sense of identity.

The sole interest of the “blue-top” and “G7” newspapers is the messages they get from “those who give them orders.” The intentions of the presidential palace – which is in no sense a homogenous power centre – can be studied in *Notre Voie*, *Le Temps*, *Le Courrier d’Abidjan* and *Les Echos du matin*. As regards the various opposition parties, the position of the Rally of Republicans (RDR) – Alassane Ouattara’s party – are reflected in *Le Patriote*, *24 Heures* or a new newspaper, *Nord-Sud Quotidien*, which was launched on 17 May. The positions of the Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI) – which was the ruling single party under the late President Félix Houphouët-Boigny – can be found in *Le Nouveau Réveil*, *L’Intelligent d’Abidjan* and *L’Événement*.

None of these newspapers hide who is behind them and paying them. They are often the newspaper’s leading shareholders. This is the case for *Le Patriote*, which is financed by the Mayama group headed by Hamed Bakayoko, the RDR minister for new information technologies



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and communication and the director of *Radio-Nostalgie*. It is also the case for *Notre Voie*, whose shareholders include Abou Dramane Sangaré, one of the vice-presidents of President Gbagbo's party, the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), and Simone Gbagbo, who is the president's wife as well as being one of the FPI's other vice-presidents. *Notre Voie*'s managing editor, Allou Wanyou Eugène, is also head of protocol at the presidential palace.

All of these newspapers, together with the daily *Le Sport* (with a print run of 7,000 in 2004), the satirical weekly *Gbich* (with a print run of 15,000) and *TopVisage* (a very successful "people" magazine with a print run of 35,000), share a shrinking market. Before the last resurgence in the crisis, in November 2004, the number of readers who buy totalled 150,000 but this subsequently fell to 85,000, according to figures given at a public meeting of the National Union of Journalists of Côte d'Ivoire (UNJCI) on 28 April. A revealing and no doubt unintentionally self-critical question was asked at the meeting: "Are we more interested in the client than the reader?" Who is the client if not the reader?

At the heart of the political battle to control public opinion

Before partition in September 2002, the national radio station, *Radio Côte d'Ivoire (RCI)*, reached 90 per cent of the country and was the most important news source. It is still the station with the biggest percentage of listeners in the government-controlled south – 47 per cent of the population listen "very often" (19 per cent) or "quite often" (28 per cent), with listeners on average tuning in for 119 minutes a day (7). Of all the programmes, the morning and evening news have the most impact (57 per cent of listeners), way ahead of sport (25 per cent). Foreign radio stations have 24 per cent of the market, with *Radio France Internationale (RFI)* dominating (20 per cent). A new FM radio station set up and run by the UN mission, UNOCI, which is currently broadcasting in Abidjan and three other cities, has not yet had any appreciable impact on these figures.

Côte d'Ivoire's two TV stations are at the heart of the political battle to control public opinion. Before partition, *RTI* reached 70 per cent of the country. It still reaches more than half of the population in the south. From 7 to 9 p.m., its news programme is watched by 46 per cent of viewers in the south, a higher rating than the most popular variety programme (40 per cent). Foreign satellite TV stations, above all *Canal+ Horizon*, have 35 per cent of the market. Like the national radio station, *RTI* is under the

government's thumb and gives exhaustive coverage to all of the president's activities. Nonetheless, according to airtime figures compiled by the National Broadcasting Council (CNCA), a regulatory body whose members are appointed by the president, "civil society" was the subject of the largest number of news reports, way ahead of the political parties (with the president's party receiving no better treatment than the opposition party, the CNCA claimed).

However, all these figures are only valid for periods when all is calm. At times of tension, *RTI* is transformed into the government's propaganda tool. Such was the case on 4 November 2004, the date of the Ivorian news media's most recent enforced "*Gleichschaltung*." As the government forces began violating the cease-fire, the main opposition newspapers were attacked and ransacked, while *RTI*'s director general and his board were forcibly removed and replaced by supporters of the president. It was not until 12 April, six days after the Pretoria accord was signed, that the last 200 pro-Gbagbo militiamen left the national television headquarters in Abidjan, which they had been occupying for months. In a clear sign that they had been there on an official mission, their "departure ceremony" was attended by Col. Philippe Mangou, the chief of staff of the National Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (FANCI).

The rebel north is something of a desert for news media and free expression. The newspapers circulating in the south have little more than a symbolic presence in the north, and even this is due only to a French bookstore in the rebel stronghold of Bouaké that distributes a few copies. The rebels brought out the first issue of their *Journal Officiel* in Bouaké on 22 September 2002, just three days after their failed bid to take power by force in Abidjan. It has since been joined by two biweeklies, *Liberté* and *Tam-Tam*, which are distributed locally. The installations of the state broadcast media in the north were taken over by the rebels, who use them to put out propaganda that is untroubled by any concern for diversity of views. *RTI* was initially rebaptised *Télé-Mutins* and then *Notre Patrie*.

A return to a minimum level of debate in the north would require the restoration of *RTI* broadcasting throughout the country with programming reflecting diversity of opinions, as envisaged in both the Marcoussis and Pretoria accords. The cost of repairing and reequipping *RTI* including the repair of 14 relay transmitters in the north is estimated at 8 billion CFA francs (12.2 million euros) in the "emergency plan" submitted to the president



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by director general Kébé Yacouba on 11 May 2005. Yacouba warned that if work does not begin in June, neither the election campaign nor the elections themselves would receive national level radio and TV coverage and would thereby be deprived of an essential guarantee of fairness.

Financial pressure

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, predator and protector of press freedom at the same time, the Ivorian government had a new law regulating both private and public broadcast media adopted on 14 December. It envisages a change in *RTI's* status from a part privately-owned, part state-owned company to an exclusively state-owned entity. Its board of governors will also henceforth have the power to appoint and dismiss the director general. Unassailable in principle, this provision nonetheless poses a threat to the continuation of the present director general, Yacouba, who is seen as someone who can guarantee impartiality (8).

Although in principle increasing their freedom, changes to the rules governing privately-owned, non-commercial radio stations contain another danger. These stations – of which there are about 50, mostly located in the towns – will be allowed to broadcast over a radius of 80 to 100 km (instead of 10 km now), will receive tax benefits and, above all, will be permitted to broadcast "local news." However, during the violence of last November and December, these stations relayed the most virulent hate messages being broadcast on national radio and one CNCA member – in an allusion to the Rwandan radio station that encouraged the 1994 genocide – privately warned that the changes "could result in *Radio des Mille Collines* multiplied by fifty."

The national assembly at the same time passed a law introducing many improvements to the privately-owned print media. It abolished prison sentences for press offences and established a number of formal requirements designed to foster more responsibility. Capital of 5 million CFA francs (7,500 euros) is needed to set up a company that publishes a newspaper. The company must have its own premises, to prevent fly-by-night publications prone to libel. The right of response is established, with a ban on adding comments to any response. Each newspaper must employ at least 11 journalists holding a press card issued by a government commission according to criteria accepted by the National Union of Journalists of Côte d'Ivoire (UNJCI). A journalist may use no more than one pseudonym, registered with commission, thereby ending the use of multiple

pseudonyms which also facilitates libel.

One other – essential – provision of the new law is the requirement to apply an existing collective pay agreement with the aim of ending corruption among poorly paid journalists. All these provisions, those affecting both broadcast and print media, are supposed to take effect on 1 June 2005, after a six-month transition. However, in mid-May it seemed that the decrees required to begin their implementation would not be ready in time.

If the collective pay accord were applied, no newspaper except *Fraternité Matin* and perhaps *Ivoir-Soir* and *L'Inter* would survive the increase in production costs (or perhaps only by means of an increased dependence on "those who give orders"). Except in these newspapers, the current real levels of pay are about half those stipulated in the collective agreement.

Pay stipulated by the accord / Current real pay

- **Trainee:** 120,000 CFA francs (183 euros) / around 50,000 CFA francs (76 euros)
- **Staff journalist:** 220,000 CFA francs (335 euros) / 100-150,000 CFA francs (152 à 229 euros)
- **Senior journalist:** 280,000 CFA francs (427 euros) / 150-200,000 CFA francs (229 à 305 euros)
- **Head of section:** 350,000 CFA francs (533 euros) / 180-220,000 CFA francs (274 à 335 euros)
- **Editor:** 450-600,000 CFA francs (685 à 914 euros) / 250-300,000 CFA francs (381 à 457 euros)

It is true that many journalists are poorly qualified. There is no journalism school in Côte d'Ivoire and the last time journalists received scholarships to train in Dakar, Yaoundé, Tunis, Bordeaux, Strasbourg or Lille was in 1985-86. But the existing pay levels – less than 300 euros for a senior journalist, for example – are not in line with the cost of living in Abidjan. Aside from any moral consideration, the vast majority of the approximately 500 journalists currently working in Côte d'Ivoire are therefore under considerable financial pressure to betray the principles of the profession.

Vendors, forums and "gombos"

A typical Ivorian daily newspaper employs about 20 editors, reporters and photographers,



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half of them trainees, and prints about 10,000 copies (selling half of them). Except for two newspapers, they are all distributed by EdiPresse, a privately-owned company that delivers some 180,000 copies every day over distances totalling more than 7,000 km in the government-controlled south. Distribution costs represent a third of a newspaper's retail price. Aside from the approximately 100 fixed points of sale (half the number that existed before the September 2002 rebellion), 60 per cent of national newspaper sales are completed by a very hierarchical army of street vendors (9). Twenty per cent of the distribution cost goes to the points of sale and the street vendors, with the vendors at the end of the chain earning 10 CFA francs (1.5 euro cents) per copy.

The retail price of a newspaper is 200 CFA francs and the revenue therefore breaks down as follows: 66 CFA francs for distribution, 60 CFA francs for the printer, 30 CFA francs for staff salaries, and 44 CFA francs left for other production costs (office rent, telephone, electricity, cars, computers etc), social security contributions and taxes, not to speak of reporting expenses. Even if you factor in advertising revenue (an average of 4 million CFA francs a month or 20 CFA francs a copy), the equation clearly does not add up. When asked about this, publishers and managing editors say they get through to the end of each month by skipping their social security and tax payments with the tacit acceptance of the authorities. Aside from the fact that this practice puts the press at the mercy of the government (which could legally close down almost all the existing newspapers), it is not enough to explain the accounting miracle that allows Côte d'Ivoire's newspapers to keep going.

Furthermore, vendors and readers conspire in various ways to swindle the newspapers. One way – financially damaging but not enormously so – is the practice of pinning up all the pages of the newspapers on big wooden boards in open spaces where unemployed people with no money and time on their hands read and absorb their venom for hours on end and then regurgitate it in shouting matches in the same spaces, which also serve as public forums. This practice reinforces the impact on the street of the messages which “those who give orders” want to convey.

Another practice, much more ruinous, is called “renting.” In the office blocks in the administrative centre of Abidjan, vendors take sets of all the day's newspaper from office to office, where they are read and then returned an hour later for the modest “rent” of 100 CFA francs which the vendors keep for themselves. Sets of newspapers are also rented at the

cheap eating places where civil servants sit around big tables to have lunch. Aside from the newspapers, everyone benefits. Readers get a quick look at all the press for almost nothing, while the vendors quickly earn 100 CFA francs, the equivalent of what they make take from the sale of 10 copies.

The venality of Côte d'Ivoire's journalists is the result of a media business model which – what with subsidies from “those who give orders,” illicit readers and inadequate salaries – lacks a sound basis and viability. As in many African countries, journalists only travel when “invited” with all costs paid and often subject also to payment of a per diem (10). Known in Abidjan as the “gombo” (a popular sauce made from okra), the per diem varies according to the media and how important the subject is for the “client.” It would be hard to get an *RTI* television crew for less than 60,000 CFA francs (90 euros). “There is no limit to the gombo,” said the head of big public corporation. “It's the reporter who negotiates on behalf of the entire crew, often threatening not to produce a report. He pockets the lion's share and distributes the rest to the sound man, the lighting man and the driver.”

Print media journalists get lower per diems but they are often quite pushy in their demands. Their insistence is proportional to their proximity to the government with the result that *Notre Voie's* journalists are nicknamed the “robbers.” Many “clients” said opposition press journalists demanded less but were less reliable: “They take the money without doing any promotion, in fact they do what they want.” Although not beyond reproach, *Fraternité Matin's* journalists are the most professional. “They have their own means of transport, provided by the newspaper,” was the approving comment of one political party leader tired of having to both “bait and transport” the press so that they come and cover his meetings.

How to rein in those who preach hate

As shown by both *Fraternité Matin* and the activist press, it would be a mistake to think most Ivorian journalists enjoy betraying their principles. The subject is not taboo and, on the contrary, is touched on in the “code of honour” which the press adopted in 1992 following the introduction of democracy and the restoration of free expression. Under the heading “Gifts, lunches and paid trips,” it says: “Journalists refuse repeated invitations and gifts that can affect their professionalism. The terms of any trip for a journalist that is paid for by someone outside of the news organization must be



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defined in advance. The news organization and the journalist can accept or refuse."

It would be wrong to mock the flexibility of this declaration of only relative independence. The problem is not even raised, let alone settled, in the charters and codes of conduct of newspapers in many developed countries including France, and practices are sometimes not much better bearing in mind the need is less.

Journalists themselves have undertaken considerable efforts to clean up the Ivorian news media. In order to go beyond the merely unionist approach of the National Union of Journalists of Côte d'Ivoire (formed in 1990) and the exclusively formal criteria of the state regulatory bodies – the National Press Council (CNP) and National Broadcasting Council (CNCA) – in 1995 they formed the Press Freedom, Ethics and Conduct Watchdog (OLPED), a self-monitoring entity then unprecedented in sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite its pompous-sounding name and its silence during periods of "patriotic" frenzy, OLPED has broad support and is recognised as having done a good job. Nine forms of "professional misconduct" – insult, inciting violence and revolt, inciting tribalism and xenophobia, inciting religious fanaticism, lack of reporting balance, lack of fraternal spirit, inciting vice, violating decency and morality, and violating human dignity – have been repeatedly denounced and have resulted in the underlying principles being widely known (11).

Accepting the evidence that it lacked a way to make journalists respect these basic rules of the trade, OLPED abandoned its initial position that "the sanction must be moral, and nothing more" and, at the National Reconciliation Forum at the end of 2001, it released a blacklist of repeated offenders, both journalists and editors who published unsigned articles that were libellous or contained hate messages.

At OLPED's request, the government's journalism commission has not issued those on the list with a press card. However a press card is not obligatory to work as a journalist and will continue not to be so when the new press law takes effect. Incomprehensibly, the new law requires that only 11 staff members at each newspaper have a press card. Nonetheless, journalists were named and shamed at a congress in June 2004 by OLPED, which has moreover established its complete independence from the National Union of Journalists of Côte d'Ivoire (UNJCI). All this has won it widespread respect within the profession, above and beyond the political divisions.

This is a significant achievement and the international community should be helping and working with OLPED and other potential local allies if it wants to have more success than in the past in its efforts to defend press freedom in Côte d'Ivoire, especially from the hate media. It should be working from an understanding of the conditions in which journalism is practised on the ground. Otherwise its – legitimate – condemnations of professional misconduct will be purely academic and have no impact on the real world. Unfortunately, the United Nations is currently doing the opposite. While the UN, at its highest level in New York, condemns the misdeeds of the hate media, the UN mission, UNOCI, is incapable of identifying them because it does not make systematic recordings and does not keep any documentation worthy of the name. Aside from "support and reinforcement for the *R77* management" and a few gifts of equipment, it has also been incapable of coming up with any strategy for how to rein in those who preach hate (12).

Conclusions and recommendations

On the basis of its investigations in Côte d'Ivoire and its consultations with many journalists there, Reporters Without Borders calls on the international community to adopt a number of urgent measures that are essential for "disarming minds, pens and microphones" in the run-up to the elections. These measures would help efforts to establish a democracy of indisputable legitimacy in order to resolve the crisis and Reporters Without Borders believes they should be included in the new UN security council resolution currently being discussed, in the form of a clear commitment to help Ivorian journalists who are fighting for press freedom in Côte d'Ivoire, especially by combatting the hate media.

- **For the print media and its unviable business model**, Reporters Without Borders recommends working closely with OLPED to seek appropriate forms of state assistance (such as a special tax regime, newsprint and distribution subsidies, government and state agency subscriptions) to make newspapers less dependent on "those who give orders." This should be done transparently and with respect for professional standards. Reporters Without Borders is aware that this is just a palliative, one that is only acceptable in the light of the urgent need to resolve the country's crisis peacefully.

The laws of the market – in other words, reader preferences – should ultimately seal the fate of many Ivorian newspapers. In this respect,



Reporters Without Borders has noted that some newspapers are beginning to eschew sensationalism and sectarianism because readers are becoming more demanding and now want to see all sides to a news story and an open debate on current issues. Unless political violence undermines this emancipation, the Ivorian press is moving towards more independence, for commercial reasons as much as – if not more than – for ethical reasons (13).

• **The most urgent need as regards the broadcasting sector is to secure the various sites of the state radio and television broadcasters, *Radio-Télévision ivoirienne (RTI)* and *Radio Côte d'Ivoire (RCI)*, especially the transmitting centre in Abobo.** After the wave of political violence that began on 4 November, not to speak of the way Gen. Robert Gueï declared himself winner in the October 2000 presidential election, it is inconceivable that the international community, in the run-up to a key election, does not secure what would clearly be a target in any attempt to derail the process. A joint force formed by Ivorian army personnel, UN peacekeepers and members of the French Licorne contingent must be deployed at once. If it is not mandated by the UN to resist any eventual attack, it should at least be authorized to neutralize the national installations of *RTI* and *RCI* in the event of a violent takeover, which would entail a possibility of new hate messages and calls for murder on the air.

• **Reporters Without Borders recognizes and welcomes the liberal nature of the press laws that were adopted on 14 December but, as peace is the overriding goal, it exceptionally proposes that, following consultation between the Ivorian authorities and journalists, their implementation should be delayed until immediately after the elections scheduled for October.** On the one hand, this would give local radio stations more time to prepare for their future responsibility to report the news, which would now begin after the elections when hopefully passions would have cooled.

Secondly, the delay would give the print media a transition period to adapt to the higher levels of pay stipulated in the collective agreement (without which many newspapers might fold or become more dependent on "those who give orders"). Finally, it would allow *RTI's* present director general to be confirmed in his post by agreement of the various parties to the crisis, thereby eliminating a potential source of conflict and maintaining a guarantee of fairness during the polling.

• **Similarly, a set of specific instructions should be**

drawn up for how the state-owned media should operate during the elections, and it should be approved at a cabinet meeting so that all of the political forces in the national reconciliation government are committed to it. This would give the state media a "road-map" during this decisive period when attempts will be made to control or influence them.

A similar initiative should be considered for the privately-owned press. OLPED could act as an arbiter for all of the news media, ensuring respect for the undertakings given and, more generally, for the "code of honour" that was adopted in 1992 and to which all journalists have freely professed support. This would imply their consent to any sanctions which might be applied by OLPED, their self-regulatory body, especially if it were to act in concert with the United Nations, which would add its international weight to the naming of media criminals.

• **As well as supporting OLPED, Reporters Without Borders appeals to the UN to bring its actions in Côte d'Ivoire into line with the condemnations of hate media that it has made in New York.** UNOCI's media reinforcement programme must be overhauled as soon as possible. It is moreover unacceptable that a blacklist of journalists allegedly guilty of hate messages was compiled and then suppressed, without any judicial follow-up. This violates the principle of presumption of innocence, especially as – possibly deliberate – leaks resulted in the naming of some people supposedly on the list. And it has done a disservice to the fight against impunity. Several *RTI* journalists who were fired at the beginning of the year are now demanding the right to go back to work and go back on the air because they were never prosecuted for the appeals for murder they made on the air six months ago. If these cases are not referred to the International Criminal Court in an effective manner, the UN should do its duty and publish the blacklist even if the result is just to shame the hate media and the journalists concerned.

NOTES

(1) Such headlines had been preceded by inflammatory language targeting immigrants from neighbouring African countries, the foreign press and government opponents before and after the 2002 rebellion in the north. A headline in *Le National* on 14 February 1999 referred to opposition leader Alassane Ouattara and his French wife as "The Negro and his white Jewess." A headline in *Le Patriote* on 27 November 2000 said, "They want to exterminate all the Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire." *Notre Voie* wrote on 24 September 2002: "Côte d'Ivoire does not just have terrorists as its enemies. It has other ones, and they are not insignificant. They are



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the international press, especially the *BBC* and *RFI* radio stations, but also *AFP*." At the same time, the state television broadcast the names and addresses of these "enemy" journalists.

(2) For example, a municipal regulation was posted on 22 January 2001 in Bonoua, a small town 50 km east of Abidjan, that contained the following: "Article II: No space or stall in the market may be assigned to a foreigner for any kind of activity. All foreigners are banned outright from practising the trade of transporter. All kinsmen are forbidden to assign any part of their lands to a foreign community. It is strictly forbidden to assign a lot to a foreigner for construction. Article III: Mixed marriage is strictly forbidden. All families are banned outright from using any procedure to integrate an outsider among us." This example shows that the hate media are just a magnifying mirror of a society that itself spawns hate and exclusion.

(3) Christian Bouquet : *Géopolitique de la Côte d'Ivoire*, Paris (Armand Colin) 2005, p. 218.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Newspapers' real sales are the best kept professional secret in Abidjan, for the obvious reason that they could undermine advertising rates or the interest of "those that give orders" in continuing to invest. Reporters Without Borders is refraining from giving individual newspaper sales in this report in order not cause any newspaper possibly irreparable harm.

(6) A small percentage of the returned newspapers are sold off very cheaply in Abidjan (3.5 million inhabitants) when the news is just a day or two old. The rest are sold by the kilo for recycling. The revenue from this is extremely small compared with the publishing company's loss, but it goes straight into the editor's pocket. The system is renewable. When one newspaper folds, another is born, as long as someone can be found willing to invest in the politics of the street or in an effective method of extortion, in which people are blackmailed into paying up to avoid being libelled.

(7) These figures come from polls carried out by independent market research consultants on behalf of privately-owned companies that wanted to know how to best allocate their advertising budget.

(8) A pioneering print media journalist, Kébé Yacouba went on to run the Angolan state radio and TV broadcaster for four years for the United Nations. He was appointed to run *RTI* in January 2004 as the compromise candidate accepted by both President Gbagbo and Seydou Diarra, the head of the national reconciliation government that was created as a result of the Marcoussis accords. Yacouba scrapped one of *RTI*'s leading "patriotic" programmes ("We are together") as soon as he took over. He then brought all of *RTI*'s 800 journalists together for a seminar in February 2004, the transcript of which was published as a book entitled "*RTI*, the book – professionalism and impartiality" and has since served as a manual for *RTI* staff.

(9) EdiPresse was formed jointly by *Fraternité Matin* and *Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne*

(NMPP). Editors often accuse it of charging exorbitant rates. Two pro-Gbagbo newspapers, *Le Courrier d'Abidjan* and *Notre Voie*, have been trying to handle their own distribution since the start of 2005, so far at the expense of skipping the interior and often delivering late to news stands in Abidjan. EdiPresse points out that it slashed its staff four years ago from 85 to 38 employees in an attempt to reduce costs and stay profitable. Nonetheless, the rate for new contracts was increased in April to 37 per cent of the retail price. Local press distribution now represents 60 per cent of EdiPresse's turnover, its foreign press distribution having fallen by a half since November's turmoil. The rapid decline in subscriptions to foreign publications has become even more precipitous since November. *Le Monde*, which used to sell 3,000 - 4,000 copies a day in the 1990s, had just 150 paying readers prior to November. Now only some 30 copies are imported and nearly all go to foreign entities in Abidjan such as embassies and banks.

(10) It is disconcerting to see western embassies pay local journalists often significant sums by the standards of their salaries to get them to attend their activities, including their frequent seminars and workshops on press ethics. But this long-established custom ensures that ceremonies formalizing international assistance grants and loans receive columns of praise in the newspapers and lots of TV airtime.

(11) Especially comparing OLPED with other NGOs in Côte d'Ivoire such as – to take an extreme example – the Ivorian Movement of Press Consumers, which claims to have 987,000 "active members."

(12) "The United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire must develop a strategy which, before the end of its mandate, allows the press to feel responsible and to play its role with complete freedom in the construction of a pacified Côte d'Ivoire," says a study written by ONUCI's press and information department. It proposes four projects, which do not appear to be very coherent. One is "the analysis of the media environment with a view to forming a unified self-regulatory body for the print media," (although there is only one such body, OLPED, which combines journalists from both print and broadcast media). The second is help for *RTI*, including the provision of unspecified equipment. The third is training of community radio personnel, including training in professional ethics, and the provision of "editing equipment, masts, transmitters, microphones, minidisc recorders, computers and printers etc." And finally there is "capacity-building for self-regulatory bodies," although, again, there is only one such body, OLPED. This capacity-building is to be achieved through "exchanges of experiences with similar bodies in the subregion and elsewhere" although Côte d'Ivoire was the pioneer in this area 10 years ago.

(13) Without abandoning their editorial bias, more and more Ivorian newspapers no longer just blindly reproduce the positions of the political sector they hail from. This is particularly the case with *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan*, *24 Heures* and *Nord-Sud Quotidien*, whose managing editor, Mété Sindou, gave the following explanation for why he left *Le Patriote* (the RDR's almost official mouthpiece): "Nowadays, the public has forced us to change what

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we give them, because they want to know more, and that includes wanting to know what's happening on the other side, in the opposing camp, not just in the other tribe but in the country next door too.” The declining fortunes of the most partisan newspapers – including *Le Patriote* and *Notre Voie* – confirms this nascent demand to be (somewhat) better informed while reading partisan content. This development matches the way the western press became less partisan, not so much for reasons of principle as responding to commercial opportunities to grow and capture the bigger advertising market that comes with readers of more diverse viewpoints (cf. James T. Hamilton: *All the News That's Fit to Sell. How the Market Transforms Information into News*, Princeton 2004, pp. 37 to 46).