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Funeral of Congolese journalist Serge Maheshe of Radio Okapi, murdered on 13 June 2007 in Bukavu.

2008 Annual Report

AFRICA

CRACKING DOWN WITHOUT ANY COMPLEXES

African governments in 2007 began doing what they had not dared to do before. Boundaries they would not previously have crossed, to crack down on journalists who annoyed them, were all removed. Free of hang-ups, several information ministers spent the year defending a certain idea of Africa – one with the face of repression. The press is disrespectful; it must be punished. Journalists are making demands; they must be gagged. Even in Mali and Benin, countries hitherto viewed as models of respect for press freedom, presidents Amadou Toumani Touré and Yayi Boni have at least once in 2007 picked up the phone to send displeasing journalists to prison. In both these cases, the heads of state have acknowledged their decisions. The year was thus one of bare-faced repression, in which they openly freed themselves from promises made. Government by effrontery.

HABITUAL PREDATORS

For some it's a habit. President of the young republic of Eritrea, Issaias Afewerki, guilty of imprisoning his former companions in arms and journalists who did not have the good fortune to escape the police, dismissed press questions about human rights in his country with utter contempt while on a visit to Europe in May. He could do so without fear, because apart from the United States, very few go in for much criticism of him. Democratic governments say they are impotent in the face of his brutality. During this time, Eritrea, which over the years has become an open air prison, has seen the country emptied of its people. Those who have not died in the inhuman conditions in prison camps have fled, on foot, to seek refuge anywhere, including in poverty and death. His rival, Meles Zenawi, prime minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, has continued to treat the press in Addis Ababa with huge disdain. Even if, under pressure from his US allies, he agreed to release journalists arrested in the roundups of November 2005 during opposition demonstrations in protest at a stolen election a few months earlier.

In Zimbabwe and Gambia, presidents Robert Mugabe and Yahya Jammeh have not released the stranglehold of their intelligence services on an independent press which has been left injured and humiliated. President Joseph Kabila, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has never had much time for unwanted witnesses or the thorns in the foot which journalists represent to him. This year, the authorities reacted with disdainful indifference even to those murdered by unidentified killers, like Serge Maheshe, of *Radio Okapi*. Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, the head of the transitional government in Somalia, which has been atomised by 17 years of anarchy, has let the military off the leash and they have set about arresting journalists who get in their way. At the same time, others have been murdered by hired killers, in the pay of the leaders of the Islamic Courts from their comfortable exile in the Eritrean capital Asmara.

In Rwanda, President Paul Kagame keeps a nervous eye on the few newspapers which his government and his allies do not yet control, to ensure they are subjected to sufficient intimidation to keep silent. For their part, the despots Teodoro Obiang Nguéma in Equatorial Guinea and Ismael Omar Guelleh in Djibouti do not need to worry about disobedient editors. They make do with the sycophancy of the public media. All those who fail to publicly fawn on them will end up with their personal file on the desks of the chief of police or the chief prosecutor.

DISGRACE AND PRISON

If African “predators” of press freedom have not yet given it up, men in power who were believed to be above all suspicion have demonstrated that journalists are not always free on the continent. This includes leaders who were thought to have been convinced of the benefits that can accrue to a poor country from a diversity of news, from harnessing public debate, public transparency and the vigilance of demanding citizens. Confronted with a revolt which he refuses to recognise as a political movement, the President of Niger, Mamadou Tandja, has imprisoned and tried several Niger and foreign journalists, who took too close an interest in the “drug traffickers” who have humiliated the army in the Air mountains. His determination not to see the Tuareg question referred to - a crisis which is undermining his fragile democracy - has ended by prompting huge international interest in the subject.

From presidents like José Eduardo dos Santos in Angola, Abdoulaye Wade in Senegal, Idriss Deby Itno in Chad, Omar al-Beshir in Sudan and Omar Bongo in Gabon, for example, one expected no more than that they stop treating the state as their personal possession and the country's journalists like their servants. But even there, argument has failed to convince the powerful, because in all these countries, jour-

nalists have been arrested, often brutally, faced frequently absurd charges and imprisonment, which is always unpleasant. These heads of state are not despots or comic opera kings, but they have violated their constitutions that guarantee freedom of the press, promises to funders and democratic standards promoted by the United Nations, with modernity, refinement and supported by administrative sophistication – with the light heart of an official, who always has to give some justification.

African journalists — perpetually facing charges of “defamation”, “publication of false new”, “damaging imputations”, “insulting the head of state”, harming national security, “sedition”, “incitement to disturb the public order” or who knows what — have to manage their own cases alone. Innocent or guilty, they have experienced the filth of a prison cell. Their families, whose chief characteristic is not to be rich, have to manage on their own resources while their breadwinner is unable to earn money.

Yes, across the continent, chiefly in the French-speaking part, there are numerous scandal sheets, which feed on ordinary corruption, chasing spectacular headlines and “little envelopes”. But the politicians, from Madagascar to Mauritania, from Guinea to Cameroun, via Cote d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic, are the main beneficiaries, making use of badly or unpaid journalists to settle their scores with opponents through bogus “revelations”. They do it because they have the means to do so and they can get way with it. Disgrace and prison are for others. Absurd logic, unjust justice.

FINANCIAL IMPUNITY

Freedom of the press in Africa was badly damaged in 2007. On at least 12 occasions during the year, men received orders to kill journalists. Police received orders on almost 150 occasions to make an arrest, not of a corrupt minister or a notorious killer but of a journalist. Even governments of countries in which Reporters Without Borders had invested some hope in previous years, have brought instruments of repression to bear against the press. Outside certain countries, like Ghana or Namibia, among others, the year was marked by a general setback. What exactly happened?

The ever greater penetration of China, oppressive superpower if ever there was one, allowed some African governments to marginalise their western support. Encumbered by vociferous NGOs and virtuous political demands, democratic countries stand no chance against Beijing's free-flowing dollars and multinationals, which send Chinese workers to supervise the building sites of African infrastructure without demanding anything in return. And then when it comes to repression, China has become an expert in it. It is Chinese technicians who scramble the signals of opposition radios in Zimbabwe. In addition, the difficulty in shedding the criminal past of the former colonial powers has been given a fresh impetus in the African nationalist revival. How many French ambassadors have been sent away with a flea in their ear, in the name of rejection of “French-Africa”, when they have attempted to negotiate the release of a journalist? Chinese ambassadors do not have this problem. How many African journalists or foreign reporters have been accused of being British spies in Zimbabwe? We would be wrong not to take these insinuations seriously. At the start of 2008, a fanatical newspaper in Abidjan tarnished the memory of Jean Hélène, a correspondent for *RFI* who was killed in a cowardly attack by a gendarme in October 2003, in claiming that he was working for French intelligence at the time.

African media, like a crumbling dam, have taken in water. Taboos have been proudly broken. A host of questions which are vital for the future of press freedom on the continent remain unanswered after this very testing year.

Léonard Vincent
Head of Africa desk

CHAD

Area: 1,284,200 sq. km.
Population: 10,468,000.
Language: French.
Head of state: Idriss Deby Itno.

The “Zoé’s Ark” case of alleged child abduction, led to the imprisonment of three journalists covering the secret operation as well as the French managers of the organisation. Elsewhere, Chadian police did not hesitate to arrest journalists considered by the government to be too unruly.

The year began with a bad omen for the newspapers in the capital N’Djamena. The zeal of government censors had left the few publications in the capital struggling with financial problems as they had been forced to appear with parts of pages blacked out since 14 November 2006. An advance censorship committee was re-established under a state of emergency declared the previous day, following a wave of bloody clashes between Arab and non-Arab communities in the east of the country. Emergency rule also banned radio and television from raising issues “which could damage public order, national unity, territorial integrity and respect for republican institutions”.

With the exception of the privately-owned pro-government daily *Le Progrès*, newspapers in the capital therefore appeared with many articles deleted. Taking advantage of the emergency, authorities in Moissala in the south of the country, on 31 January carried out their first and last act of coercion towards a privately-owned radio. Police arrested Marcel Ngargoto, a journalist on community *Radio Brakoss* and secretary general of Human Rights Without Borders (DHSF) after he broadcast a hard-hitting exposé about the city police chief whom he accused of extorting money from residents. The journalist was accused of “ruthless handling of sensitive news which could harm national cohesion”. He was released on 19 May after he went on hunger strike for several days.

The state of emergency expired at midnight on 25 May after the government, aware that peace cannot be restored through a censor’s scissors, did not ask the National Assembly for its renewal. The special cell within the communications ministry set up to censor newspapers ceased to operate on that day and Chadian newspapers were once again free to appear as normal.

INCONVENIENT PRISONERS

But the most extraordinary episode came at the end of October, as a result of the “Zoé’s Ark” scandal in which the French organisation planned to illegally evacuate to France around 100 children, supposedly orphans from Darfur. Covering the operation for the media were journalist/cameraman for the *Capa* photo agency, Marc Garmirian, photographer with the *Synchro X*, agency, Jean-Daniel Guillou, and journalist on *France 3 Méditerranée* Marie-Agnès Peléran (who was in Chad to make a documentary on her own experience hosting one of the “orphans”). They were all arrested along with members of “Zoé’s Ark” and faced the same charges. Several foreign journalists who arrived to cover the case were themselves threatened or assaulted by Chadian demonstrators, outraged by the case and its exploitation by the N’Djamena government. The three journalists were released and then acquitted under international pressure and the personal involvement of French President, Nicholas Sarkozy.

The Chadian authorities and an often fractious low-circulation private press – which hardly sells outside the capital - have in the past few years lived in a state of permanent mutual distrust. Threats and harassment are frequent, as exemplified by an incident at the start of October in which a car owned by, managing editor of the privately owned weekly *Le Temps*, Michael Didama, was machine-gunned and torched while he was on a trip abroad.

The year ended with another arrest on 14 December, of Nadjikimo Benoudjita, managing editor of private weekly *Notre Temps* who was charged three days later with “incitement to tribal and religious hatred” then released on bail awaiting trial. While he was in custody, judicial police

CHAD

in his presence searched his home, which doubled as an office for *Notre Temps* during which police told Nguémadki Dkimasngar, the editor of the very low circulation newspaper that the minister of information and public security had ordered

that the paper be “purely and simply shut down”. Nadjikimo Benoudjita has since left Chad, thus satisfying the desire of the government to get rid of an acerbic critic without having to lumber itself with a highly political prisoner.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Area: 2,344,860 sq. km.
Population: 60,644,000.
Language: French.
Head of state: Joseph Kabila.

The vast territory of the Democratic Republic of Congo boasts hundreds of newspapers and scores of privately-owned radio and television stations. Political tensions run high and the media, often dependent on parties competing for power and unscrupulous businessmen, are frequently targets of sometimes deadly score-settling.

The Congolese media is highly politicised and consequently suffers as a result of highly-charged political tensions across the country. Following the 2006 presidential election, media owned by Jean-Pierre Bemba, former vice-president and unsuccessful election rival to Joseph Kabila, were particularly targeted. The broadcast signal of TV and radio stations owned by Bemba was interrupted on 21 March 2007, after he said in an interview in the Lingala language, that the army command was embezzling 500 million Congolese francs a month from the army payroll. Over the next two days bloody clashes erupted in the streets of Kinshasa pitting the DR Congo Armed Forces (FARDC) against the personal guard of Senator Bemba, who had refused to allow his men to be integrated into the regular army, for lack of sufficient guarantees of their safety. During the clashes, uniformed men raided the studios of *Canal Kin Télévision* (CKTV), *Canal Congo Television* (CCTV), and *Radio Liberté Kinshasa* (*Ralik*). Repeated death threats forced numbers of staff on Jean-Pierre Bemba-owned media into hiding.

In another sign of the close surveillance imposed on the Congolese private media, a botched decision by the information minister silenced four community radios in Kinshasa and put at risk the continued existence of 200 more throughout the country. The ministry took the view that the targeted media did not have licences for regular broadcasts, receipts or proof of payment of taxes owed to the government. Some of them subsequently produced documents proving they were complying with the law, including a payment schedule agreed with the General Directorate for Administrative and State Revenue Collection (DGRD). Broadcasts resumed on 24 October. Community radios operating in a legal vacuum,

without any state aid, played a crucial role in providing the public with news about the transition process and the various election dates in the Democratic Republic of Congo in recent years. A solution was finally found at the end of the year.

FREQUENT IMPRISONMENT

Journalists are imprisoned frequently both in Kinshasa and in the provinces. Press freedom organisations often face Kafkaesque situations because of absurd laws, a high level of corruption in all sectors of the administration and the authorities' aggressive policies. In one such case, Bosange Mbaka, known as "Che Guevara", editor of the periodical *Mambenga*, spent ten months in custody because of a ridiculous event. He was covering a public hearing at Kinshasa's Supreme Court on 21 November 2006, when clashes broke out between soldiers and militants of Jean-Pierre Bemba's party during which demonstrators torched the building. During the clashes, the journalist recovered a soldier's mobile phone which he was about to hand in to the guardroom. He was arrested minutes later and charged with "theft of military property". He was only acquitted on 7 September 2007. A total of ten Congolese journalists saw the inside of prison during the year and 54 were stopped and questioned by security forces, according to Reporters Without Borders' partner organisation, Journalist in Danger (JED).

VILE MURDER

Beyond the usual minor scandals, the Congolese press was badly shaken by a vile murder followed by an outrageous legal error. Journalist and editor on local *Radio Okapi*, Serge Maheshe, 31, was shot dead by two men in plainclothes as he left a

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

friend's home in a residential neighbourhood of Bukavu, capital of South Kivu in eastern Congo in the evening of 13 June. The gunmen waylaid Maheshe and two friends as they were about to get into a "UN" marked vehicle used by the radio journalists and ordered them to lie on the ground. One of them fired two bullets into the journalists' legs and three into his chest. Maheshe had worked for *Radio Okapi* since 2002 and was a leading media figure in the region.

To general incredulity, the trial of two soldiers arrested some 50 metres from the murder scene in possession of weapons that had just been fired, opened before the Bukavu military court on the evening of the following day. Around 20 people had been arrested in a round-up within hours of the murder. The travesty of a trial ended on 28 August with a new and astonishing turnaround in which four men were sentenced to death: Freddy Bisimwa and Masasile Rwezangabo, two small-time crooks; and two of the journalist's close friends, Serge Mohima and Alain Shamavu. The verdict was based solely on the contradictory accusations of the two criminals without any proof and complete absence of motive. No other leads were followed. The court itself recognised that there were gaps in the case in which the prosecution scenario did not stand up to examination. The verdict was based on the "confessions"

of the two main suspects, which had accused the journalists' friends of instigating the murder but without producing any motive or evidence. In a further development a few weeks later, the two men wrote a letter from prison clearing the two friends and accusing military judges of having bribed them and provided them with compromising material to support their story. Serge Mohima and Alain Shamavu remain in prison and under death sentence while awaiting their appeal.

A few weeks after the murder of Serge Maheshe, Patrick Kikuku Wilungula, a freelance photographer working for the *Agence congolaise de presse (ACP)* and privately-owned weekly Kinshasa-based weekly *L'Hebdo de l'est*, died from a single shot to the head fired by a gunman in Goma, North Kivu, eastern Congo. The motive and identify of killer were unknown

UNDER PERMANENT THREAT

Reporters Without Borders has voiced its exasperation and anxiety about constant threats against the JED, whose leadership is forced to live with unrelenting risk. Even though they have received frequent anonymous death threats and insults for the past two years, the JED leaders received at least two serious warnings in 2007, prompting them to temporarily leave the country.



ERITREA

Area: 117,600 sq. km.
Population: 4,400,000.
Languages: Tigrinya, Arabic.
Head of state: Issaias Afeworki.

For the first time, this small country in the Horn of Africa led since independence by Issaias Afeworki, figures in last place in Reporters Without Borders' worldwide press freedom index, for the simple reason that the situation has gone from bad to worse. The country has been cut off from the rest of the world since major police round-ups in September 2001 and at least four journalists have died in prison.

The high hopes that Eritreans had for their country at independence, won on 25 May 1993 after a valiant 30-year guerrilla war, have completely collapsed. President Issaias Afeworki and his close allies sent the political police in against the reformist wing of the ruling party on 18 September 2001. The war with Ethiopia had just ended and growing numbers were calling for their freedom. The capital became a hunting ground to track down opponents or those accused of opposition. Former companions in arms, ministers and their advisers as well as influential generals were thrown in prison. The handful of independent newspapers appearing in the capital, Asmara, were banned and their publishers and editors arrested. All criticism of the regime was henceforth condemned as "harming national security". Along with hundreds of political and military figures, 13 journalists were caught up in the crackdown or gave themselves up to the authorities. They were all imprisoned in Asmara's number one prison before being transferred to secret detention centres, in April 2002, after having had the temerity to ask to be put on trial. Since then they have disappeared.

DEATHS IN PRISON

News that does filter out of Eritrea is as rare as it is terrifying. Prison guards, who fled abroad in 2006, revealed that at least three of the journalists who were arrested in 2001, died in prison between 2005 and 2006. And on 11 January, Fessehaye Yohannes, known as "Joshua" one of the most important figures in the country's intellectual life, died from the effects of appalling prison conditions in Eiraeiro in the north-east of the country where the highest profile prisoners are held. The family were not informed about the death of the co-founder of the weekly *Setit*, poet, playwright, and theatre troupe director and his body was not

returned to them. This horrifying state of affairs led to Eritrea being ranked last on Reporters Without Borders' world press freedom index for the first time, just after North Korea.

The very few foreign correspondents based in Asmara are directly accountable to the information minister, Ali Abdu, who has no hesitation in suspending their work permits at the slightest deviation. Those they interview are at risk of immediate imprisonment. Journalists wishing to travel to Eritrea have to wait for months, during which time they have to convince the Eritrean ambassadors in their home countries that the reporting they plan will be favourable to the government. Any who refer in their articles to the lamentable state of civil and political liberties in the country are expelled.

AN OPEN-AIR PRISON

Eritreans are forced to live isolated lives in an open-air prison in which the state-run media have become Soviet-style instruments of propaganda. Under the close surveillance of Ali Abdu, staff on public *Eri-TV*, the radio *Dimtsi Hafash* (*Voice of the Broad Masses*) and the government dailies have been turned into the government's foot soldiers. The president, his chief advisers and the military all use the media to cultivate a permanent fear of Ethiopian aggression to maintain themselves in power. This fear of imminent war is thus fuelled on a daily basis and transmitted to the diaspora, which provides the government's main financial support.

It is no surprise therefore that in the face of this catastrophe, the country is gradually emptying of its people. Every week, around 120 Eritrean asylum-seekers are added to the 130,000 refugees already living in UNHCR tents in Sudan. Deserting



ERITREA

soldiers, youths fleeing constant conscription, ex-prisoners, academics, artists, peasants, sports stars, every social category is piling up in the refugee camps of neighbouring states, while waiting to be accepted by a third country. Many journalists working for the public media who can no longer stand being gagged by the government have also gone into exile. Some leave on foot following a route opened up by people smugglers to Sudan or Ethiopia at the risk of being shot dead by border guards who have orders to shoot on sight. Some have been arrested while trying to flee, like Eyob Kesseste, a journalist with the Amharic service of *Dimtsi Hafash*, and Johnny Hisabu, an editor on *Eri-TV*, both imprisoned somewhere in the country since their capture during the year. This secret escape route cost the life of one journalist in June, Paulos Kidane, who worked for *Eri-TV*'s Amharic service. After walking for six days, exhausted and suffering from epilepsy, he parted company with his group a few kilometres short of the border and waited near a village, hoping to recover sufficiently to continue his journey. No information filtered out about his fate for several weeks, until the Eritrean information ministry informed his family and staff on public media at the end of June that he had "died accidentally".

Paulos Kidane was one of the most popular journalists in Asmara but he chose to leave the country after he was arrested along with eight other state media staff from 12 November 2006 onwards after public defections by several other renowned journalists. The authorities arrested them because they were suspected of still being in touch with the fugitives or of planning to leave themselves. After

his release he told Reporters Without Borders that he and his colleagues had been "beaten and tortured in prison after refusing to give the passwords for our emails". "We finally cracked because the pain was too much," he added. After their release on bail the "November prisoners" were followed and their phones tapped. They were forced to go back to work and were banned from leaving Asmara. Out of the nine journalists arrested, only seven were later freed. A young woman presenter on the Arabic service of *Eri-TV*, Fethia Khaled, was reportedly conscripted into the army, while Daniel Mussie, of the Oromo service of *Dimtsi Hafash* never left prison.

EUROPEAN FAILURE

This tragedy is revealing of the blatant failure of the "stealth diplomacy" adopted by the European Union. Development programmes worth 122 million Euros over five years, were agreed in May by European Commissioner Louis Michel. In exchange the EU called on the Eritrean government to "adopt a constructive approach to the resolution of regional crises as well as to progress in human rights and press freedom". But on the day of the signing of the agreement on 4 May, the Eritrean president scornfully brushed aside critical questions from European journalists about human rights in Eritrea at a joint press conference with Louis Michel in Brussels. The EU official nevertheless said he was "very, very honoured" to welcome Issaias Afeworki to the Commission. As a result, Reporters Without Borders is campaigning for the Eritrean president and his ministers to be declared *persona non grata* in Europe.



ETHIOPIA

Area: 1,104,300 sq. km.
Population: 81,021,000.
Language: Amharic.
Head of government: Meles Zenawi.

The crisis which began in November 2005 with the arrest of around 20 newspaper bosses ended honourably, in 2007, thanks to international pressure. But the climate remains bad and self-censorship frequent. Two Eritrea journalists are still being used as hostages, after their capture in Somalia.

The Ethiopia of Meles Zenawi is not the dictatorship of former president Mengistu, who was overthrown in 1991 and who held the country in a Stalinist grip. Privately-owned newspapers do their best to enliven the intellectual life of the capital, Addis Ababa but the climate is hostile. Heavy prison sentences are always inflicted on those who an easily influenced court system considers guilty of “defamation” or “publishing false news”. Self-censorship is constant. Foreign correspondents based in Ethiopia have to take care not to embarrass the government, which is facing a raft of military problems in the provinces and the region, and which reacts with extreme harshness towards journalists it views as dangerous.

RELATIVE RELAXATION

The year 2007 experienced a relative relaxation with the acquittal of detainees facing heavy jail sentences. The international community had been watching for two years as the leadership of the main opposition coalition and newspaper bosses who supported them awaited trial in jail on charges which could mean the death penalty. But while they were being held in atrocious conditions and treated with contempt by the government, the federal high court in April acquitted 25 of the accused in a major political trial being held in Addis Ababa for a year. They had been charged with “genocide”, “high treason” and “attempted overthrow of the constitutional order” and had been held in prison since November 2005, after being arrested in the round-ups by Ethiopian police cracking down after protest rallies organised by the chief opposition grouping, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD, Kinijit in Amharic). Eight of the 25 people who were freed were journalists. The court ruled that the prosecutor had not presented sufficiently convincing evidence of their guilt. A first step appeared to have been taken to resolve a crisis that had been poisoning Ethiopian political life.

But there was a spectacular reversal on 16 July when it was learned with astonishment that six journalists were among 43 opposition figures sentenced, in an identical case, to prison terms ranging from 18 months to life imprisonment. Most of them were found guilty of “attempting to overturn the constitutional order”. Four of them were however released on the 20 July after benefiting from an amnesty, the last two, who were in exile abroad, having been tried in their absence. One month later the last three journalists detained since November 2005 were freed as a result of a presidential pardon. The crisis, which had lasted for 22 months, thus came to a final conclusion.

However even for ordinary press cases, the Ethiopian government has a harsh legislative arsenal at its disposal and is prepared to use it to get rid of awkward journalists and it has become commonplace for it to dig up old cases. The Supreme Court in January rejected an appeal from Abraham Reta, journalist on the privately-owned weekly *Addis Admas*, against his one-year sentence imposed for “defamation” in May 2006 for an article published in 2002, when he was editor of the weekly *Ruh*, in which he named without proof three top officials allegedly implicated in a corruption case. He was first arrested in April 2006 and served a three-month jail sentence before being released on bail while awaiting the outcome of his appeal. After several hearings at which Abraham Reta pleaded not guilty and was forced to reveal the source of his article, he was sent back to prison to serve the last nine months of his sentence. Between December 2005 and December 2006, Reporters Without Borders recorded four cases of journalists being sent to prison for long periods (between eight and 18 month) for four year old cases. All have since been released, but they do not look like being able to resume their work as journalists.



ETHIOPIA

HOSTAGES TAKEN IN SOMALIA

A cautious relaxation by the Ethiopian government at the end of the year, with the creation of a private independent radio and reform of the press law, cannot mask the fact that Ethiopia is a country in which the free exercise of journalism rapidly comes up against the jumpiness of the part of the authorities.

Any deterioration in the political climate systematically works through to the press. The sending of the Ethiopian army into Somalia in support of transitional government forces at the end of December 2006 was a source of additional tension. And the political and military support by neighbouring Eritrea for Somalia's Union of the Islamic Courts exacerbated the situation to the extent that two journalists working for public media in Asmara were taken hostage by Ethiopian forces as they tried to flee the combat zone.

Saleh Idris Gama, journalist on Eritrean state-run *Eri-TV*, and cameraman Tesfalidet Kidane Tesfazghi disappeared in Mogadishu at the end of 2006. Reporters Without Borders, supplied their names to the Somali government at the end of February 2007 in a bid to find out if they were being detained or had been identified as casualties of the fighting. No reply had yet been given to this request when, at the start of April, the Eritrean foreign minister publicly announced the arrest of several of its nationals in Somalia, confirming that the team from *Eri-TV* were still alive. Several days previously, having obtained similar information, Reporters Without Borders had contacted Somali intelligence seeking news of the Eritrean journa-

lists, providing their identity and asking for the right to make telephone contact with them. This request had been rejected.

A few days later, video footage of Saleh Idris Gama and Tesfalidet Kidane Tesfazghi were placed on a pro-governmental Ethiopian website, subtitles to the interview called them "*shabia* soldiers" (*shabia* meaning "popular", the nickname for the Eritrean regime). Since then the two men have been held by the intelligence services somewhere in Ethiopia and the Addis Ababa government refuses to provide any information about them.

They are not the only journalists imprisoned in Ethiopia about whom very little information is available. Shiferraw Insermu, a journalist on the Oromo service of state-run *ETV* suspected of being an informer for the separatist Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), is still languishing in prison after he and his colleague Dhabassa Wakjira were arrested for the first time at their homes in Addis Ababa, on 22 April 2004. The federal high court ordered their release on bail on the following 9 August, but only Shiferraw Insermu was set free. The journalist was rearrested on 17 August and released on order of the federal high court in mid-October. *ETV* refused to allow him to resume his job and he was trying to find other work when he was arrested for a third time, on 11 January 2005. He has remained in custody since that date, most likely at the central prison known as "Kerchiele". Dhabassa Wakjira was held without interruption until 2006, as the prison authorities failed to comply with various court orders to release him on bail. He was finally released and has since fled Ethiopia and sought asylum abroad.



GAMBIA

Area: 11,300 sq. km.
Population: 1,663,000.
Language: English.
Head of state: Yahya Jammeh.

The Gambian press does its best to survive in a climate in which an authoritarian president believes Aids can be cured with ointments and by reading the Koran, where intelligence services are dreaded for the brutality of their methods, the murder of the doyen of the journalists remains unpunished and there is an absolute intolerance of any form of criticism.

Swaying palms, immaculate beaches, a refreshing sea breeze and clear nights... Gambia, a former British colony surrounded by Senegal, is a tourist paradise whose sea coast is dotted with luxury hotels and holiday villages. But the country headed by the young president Yahya Jammeh is also the realm of an often irrational military regime, that tortures and terrorises those who dare to stand up to the head of state or his friends. The murder of the country's most renowned journalist, Deyda Hydara, on the night of 16 December 2004, brought to an end the era in which a well-organised, rigorous, privately-run press could still stand its ground against a government which did not conceal its hostility towards it. Since that date, almost all those who were an annoyance to the president have fallen into line through force or free will, or have left the country.

MURDER WITH IMPUNITY

Deyda Hydara, editor of the privately-owned daily *The Point*, correspondent for *Agence France-Presse* (AFP) and Reporters Without Borders, was shot dead as he drove staff on his paper home. He had previously received regular threats from the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) which was watching him minutes before his murder, in a street housing a police barracks. Two Reporters Without Borders' investigations in Gambia have highlighted aspects casting strong suspicion on the NIA and a small militia group answering to President Yahya Jammeh. But no serious investigation has been carried out to identify the killers or those who instigated the killing. The only official statement made by the Gambian investigators, six months after the murder, suggested in a clearly trumped up accusation that Deyda Hydara, whom they termed a "provocateur", was killed in a sexual case. At an interview marking the New Year in January 2007, Yahya Jammeh said Hydara's murder

had been carried out by "enemies of Gambia". He added that those responsible wanted to prevent him from being elected president of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) but he did not elaborate.

Very disturbing reports come out of Gambia, although it is often difficult to check them because of bad faith and obstruction on the part of the authorities. This was the case, on 12 January, when the opposition weekly *Foroyaa* revealed that "Chief" Ebrima Manneh, journalist on the privately-owned *Daily Observer*, had been held for three months and three weeks at a police station in Fatoto, a small town 400 km east of the capital after being taken to various police stations since his arrest by the intelligence services, on 7 July 2006. The authorities have always denied holding the journalist, who has no charges pending against him. He was arrested for unknown reasons shortly after the closure of the African Union (AU) summit held in Banjul when there were a number of arrests within the independent press, accused of having disrupted the event. In autumn 2007, several international press freedom organisations, including Reporters Without Borders, obtained an account from a former political prisoner who said he had been held with "Chief" Ebrima Manneh and that he had "definitively disappeared" after being taken away at night for interrogation by the NIA.

POLICE ON THE PROWL

Having used unfairness and brutality to gag the country's journalists, the authorities now take on anyone else who comes within range. Gambian journalist, Fatou Jaw Manneh, a US resident for around ten years, was arrested on 28 March as she got off the plane on a visit to Gambia for the funeral of her father. She was arrested by NIA agents after she was denounced by another passenger



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and taken to the HQ of the intelligence services on the sea front at Banjul. A former journalist on the privately-owned *Daily Observer*, Fatou Jaw Manneh is a pro-democracy activist and contributor to several websites and the opposition movement, "Save The Gambia Democracy Project". She published an article in 2003 in a daily which has since been illegally closed, *The Independent*, which prompted the arrest and unfair detention for three days of its editor, Abdoulie Sey. From then on she contributed to the website *AllGambian.net*, and was prosecuted for an article, in October 2005, in which she accused President Yahya Jammeh of "tearing our beloved country to shreds" and describing the head of state as "a bundle of terror". She was charged with "intention to commit sedition", "publication of seditious words" and "publication of false news intended to create public fear and alarm" and faces three years in prison. Throughout 2007, her trial lurched from one adjournment to another leaving her with a constant threat hanging over her.

Never ending trials are one of the specialities of the government to force awkward journalists to live in permanent insecurity. In this way, a young journalist on *The Independent*, Lamin Fatty, endured a process lasting more than a year before being sentenced to one year in prison or the option of a fine of 1,850 dollars (about 1,375 Euros). He had already spent two months in prison in 2006, along with the publication director and the editor, Madi Ceesay and Musa Saidu Khan, for publishing a false report, which had been corrected in the next edition alongside an apology. Thanks to the solidarity

of his colleagues, who contributed to a collection to pay the fine, the journalist was able to avoid going back to prison.

But it is not always opposition figures or critical investigators who fall victim to the intolerance of the president. Crackdowns are also inflicted on the ranks of the faithful. Malick Jones, chief producer on the state-run *Gambia Radio and Television Services (GRTS)* and Mam Sait Ceesay, communications director of the Gambian presidency, were arrested on 9 September for having informed the pro-government *Daily Observer* of the supposed sacking of the president's press and public relations director, which turned out to be false. The two were also accused of sending information to the US-based opposition website, *Freedom Newspaper*, which goes in for virulent criticism of the Gambian government and claims to have sources within the presidency. Mam Sait Ceesay was released from Mile Two prison, in Banjul, on 19 September, after paying bail of 200,000 Dalasis (about 6,730 Euros). Malick Jones was only released on 22 September 2007, after finding the same amount of bail.

Hydara's newspaper *The Point* continues to appear against this background of permanent surveillance, paranoia and brutality. It is headed by Pap Saine, who is also correspondent for *Reuters* in Gambia. The editorial staff knows that each edition is examined, taken apart and discussed high up and that the least pretext can serve to send the dreaded NIA against the journalists or to ransack the premises of the country's last independent daily.

MAURITANIA

Area: 1,025,520 sq. km.

Population: 3,044,000.

Languages: Arabic, French.

Head of state: Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi.

Freedom of press is alive and well in Mauritania, even if journalists in the capital Nouakchott face many complex challenges. The year 2007 was distinguished by a rare experience in Africa: balanced coverage of all political players during the presidential election campaign.

Mauritania has been through testing times since the 2005 coup, going through an agreed democratic transition, a constitutional referendum, municipal elections and fair and open legislative and presidential elections... and a return to civil liberties, including press freedom. Even though much work remains to be done for journalists in Nouakchott the situation is much better than it was.

BALANCED COVERAGE

Reporters Without Borders carried out monitoring in February and March 2007 of news coverage of the presidential campaign by Mauritania's public media, as part of its role in supporting the transition which began in October 2005. The presidential poll was chosen because it is regulated by electoral law, guaranteeing equal media access to all competing political forces. In addition, as a public service financed by the state, it has a duty to act in an exemplary manner in election periods. At the end of the monitoring, the organisation hailed the sustained efforts of the public media to respect the complex rules of fairness and balance in covering news from the different presidential candidates. It was a challenge met thanks to the work of the regulatory body, the management and journalists working for radio, television, the written press and news agencies.

Leaving to one side any imbalance in the figures, which was slight, Reporters Without Borders was quick to praise the commitment and effort of public media management in such a sensitive historic period and hailed the pragmatism and constructive spirit of the new media regulatory body, the High Authority for Press and Broadcasting (HAPA).

GUTTER PRESS

Since the fall of the dictator Maaouiya Ould Taya, in August 2005, Mauritania's press problems became less serious but more complicated. The former

regime, which sought to undermine the independent press, which proved a thorn in its side, favoured newspapers whose management had few scruples about corruption and blackmail and whose journalists were more in search of bribes than news. Reporters Without Borders has always told the Mauritanian authorities that prison was not the correct response and that it should help the "serious" press to survive in a tough market.

The brief imprisonment of Abdel Fettah Ould Ebeidna, managing editor of the Arabic-language *al-Aqsa*, sent a negative signal to the Mauritanian press, when the country was facing a far-reaching political-criminal scandal. The journalist, head of a publication with often doubtful ethical practices, spent four days in prison, on the basis of a defamation suit brought against the newspaper by businessman Mohamed Ould Bouammatou. He had been named in the daily's 16 May edition in connection with a massive cocaine trafficking case uncovered overnight on 1-2 May by police in Nouadhibou, northern Mauritania and implicating the son of a former president, a businessman and several sons of influential figures. The article, which mixed up barely supported claims and news in the conditional tense, said that Mohamed Ould Bouammatou had been charged in the case. Some Mauritanian journalists told Reporters Without Borders that the articles attacking Mohamed Ould Bouammatou had been ordered and paid for by a clan rival in order to discredit him. Ould Ebeidna was sentenced on 7 November to one year in prison, a 50,000-Ouguiya fine (170 Euros) and 300 million Ouguiyas (one million Euros) in damages. The journalist who was currently out of the country, in a Gulf state, did not serve his sentence.

TRIBAL INFLUENCES

Another problem in Mauritania is that the security forces have little enthusiasm for according any

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respect to the press. And family or tribal influences sometimes protect those responsible for press freedom violations from being punished. This was the case, on 16 August when Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Moghdad, journalist on public *Radio Mauritania*, was at the health ministry covering a visit by Prime Minister Zein Ould Zeidane. He left the room for a few moments and as he tried to return to the conference room was intercepted by the head of the prime minister's guard, Zein Ould Soueydatt. Even though the journalist had his press card with him, Zein Ould Soueydatt ordered his men to beat him. The assault was condemned by the HAPA which said "no circumstances can justify resorting to physical force against a journalist doing their job". A few days later, the journalist's lawyer revealed that on the day after the assault, the prosecutor of the republic had refused to record a complaint on behalf of his client, on the

grounds that his file was incomplete. The lawyer on 21 August collected the requested documents, including medical certificates, and attempted to lodge a complaint for a second time. The prosecutor's office still refused to accept it.

However, clan loyalties can also help in reaching a compromise. Sidi Mohamed Ould Ebbe, editor of the privately-owned daily *El Bedil Athalith*, was on 18 August charged with "defamation" following a complaint from the president's wife, which had been made four days earlier. Her complaint related to two articles which said she had used her position to seek funding for a humanitarian organisation she chaired. The editor told the press that he was "prepared to co-operate", while deploring the interpretation put on the two articles, which he said "were not intended to harm the first lady". In fact an understanding was arrived at and the case was closed.

NIGER

Area: 1,267,000 sq. km.
Population: 13,737,000.
Language: French.
Head of state: Mamadou Tandja.

Five journalists, three of them foreigners, were imprisoned in 2007 for reporting on or interviewing Touareg rebels, who, from February onwards began attacking military posts in the north of the country. The government cannot bear to be contradicted by the press over a rebellion which it views as nothing more than a case of people “cutting off the roads”.

A hitherto unknown armed Touareg group, The Niger Justice Movement (MNJ), on 3 February 2007 attacked an army barracks in Iférouane, in the Air mountains, killing three soldiers. A few days later, the rebel group claimed responsibility for the bloody assault in the name of the MNJ, demanding greater rights for the Touareg and a larger share of the wealth. This murderous episode had a lasting effect on the fragile edifice on which President Mamadou Tandja had sought to lead his country to general elections scheduled for 2010. But it also considerably angered the Niger authorities who were stunned to see increased attacks in this uranium-mining region, and who sealed off the area militarily to silence journalists, foreign or Nigerian, who took too close an interest in the crisis.

EMBARRASSING WITNESSES

Five journalists, three of them French, were sent to prison in 2007 for contradicting the government's version of events that the MNJ was a group of “armed bandits” and “drug-traffickers”. The first to be arrested, at the end of August, was François Bergeron, an independent documentary-maker, who entered Niger secretly to make film on Touareg culture. He was held for 45 days and released on 6 October after lengthy and laborious negotiations between the French and Niger authorities.

While the French journalist was still being held, on 20 September, Moussa Kaka, director of privately-owned *Radio Saraounia*, and correspondent in Niger for *Radio France Internationale (RFI)* and Reporters Without Borders, was arrested at the radio studios. A few days later, after the prosecutor general had publicly accused him of “conniving” with the rebels, Kaka, one of the country's best known and experienced journalists, was charged with “complicity in a plot against the authority

of the state”. The authorities provided the courts with phone recordings to back up the accusation, which they described as overwhelming, of conversations between Kaka and one of the rebel chiefs, Alagi Alambo. It was not the first time the journalist, who has covered the Touareg issue for 15 years, had been arrested for similar reasons. He received a public death threat on 14 July, from the head of army staff, General Boureima. *RFI* broadcasts were suspended for one month by the media regulatory body, the Superior Communication Council (CSC), for allegedly “putting out false news” about events linked to the MNJ. Since his arrest, Moussa Kaka is awaiting his trial, confidently and proclaiming his innocence. Reporters Without Borders, who was able to visit him at the civilian prison in Niamey in November, pleaded his case with the authorities and reaffirmed after investigating the case, that it was convinced of his innocence.

Two weeks after the arrest of Kaka, the editor of a privately-owned weekly appearing in Agadez, Ibrahim Manzo Diallo, was arrested by Niger border police at the airport in Niamey as he was about to board a flight for France, where he was going to attend a training course. He was charged with “membership of a criminal gang” - a similar but less serious charge than that against his Niamey colleague, Moussa Kaka - and is awaiting trial in Agadez prison. It was not the first run-in with the authorities either for the small, low-circulation paper, founded by the former professor of literature in 2002. In June, *Air-Info* was shut down for three months for having allegedly “incited violence” in the conflict in the region between the army and the MNJ. He was arrested in July by police in Agadez after launching a new weekly. His deputy, the journalist, Daouda Yacouba, spent a week in a cell at his side, before being released without charge. His charge sheet is based on the

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same elements: phone tap recordings, carried out in unclear circumstances, showing the journalist's alleged complicity with the rebels.

In the midst of this run of bad news, Reporters Without Borders was pleased to note that in September, independent judges, following a major judicial reform, re-examined these cases and managed not to give way to any political pressure. On 17 November, the examining magistrate in the Moussa Kaka case ruled that telephone tap recordings produced by the authorities were inadmissible. The judge said they violated the private nature of communications guaranteed under the constitution and had been done without a judicial order. The public ministry appealed against the decision, which could lead, if the appeal court confirms the judge's conclusions, to the *RFI* correspondent's release and, by extension that of Ibrahim Manzo Diallo.

This was the situation when two French journalists, Thomas Dandois and Pierre Creisson,

were arrested in their turn in Niamey, after filming a report without permission for the French-German channel Arte on the MNJ in the Air mountains. They were charged on 21 December with "harming state security" and are due to appear in court at the start of 2008.

PROMISE OF REFORM

It should be noted that against this background, the Niger government has postponed planned reform of the press law, which would abolish prison terms for "defamation" and "publication of false news". According to the Communications Minister, the new draft law is ready, but will have to wait for a return to peace before it is put before parliament. The press in Niger has accepted this. In the past, the government has promised on several occasions to.. keep its promise of reform, made in 2003 during the presidential election campaign.



NIGERIA

Area: 923,770 sq. km.
Population: 144,720,000.
Language: English.
Head of state: Umaru Musa Yar'Adua.

The West African giant rejoices in a privately-owned, plentiful and irreverent press, eager to expose the intrigues of an often corrupt political class. But the authorities have a number of means of slapping down journalists who are too curious or too annoying, among them the dreaded internal intelligence services which pose a constant threat.

A complex jigsaw on the scale of a continent, the federal state of Nigeria is often a violent place for the press. They suffer frequent beatings, unfair arrests, police raids and seizures both in the provinces and in Abuja. But, paradoxically, the 36 states and its federal district are also a boom area for scores of privately-owned newspapers, radio and television stations, which take delight in revealing the immorality of a corrupt and capricious political class. And as a result run the risks of Nigerians the government considers to be too disrespectful.

THE ARMED WING OF GOVERNMENT

During this electoral year in which Nigeria was due to choose a new head of state, the federal government again relied on the feared internal intelligence, the State Security Service (SSS). Provider of the government's brutal shock tactics, the SSS was once again this year condemned by Reporters Without Borders as a "press freedom predator", a designation which it has held since 2005.

Police raids resumed from the start of 2007. Around a dozen SSS agents burst into the offices of the private daily, *Leadership*, in Abuja on the morning of 9 January leaving again a few minutes later having arrested the managing director, Abraham Nda-Isaiah, the editor, Bashir Bello Akko, and a journalist, Abdulazeez Sanni. The SSS had been looking for journalist Danladi Ndayebo, as well as a copy of an article which appeared on 6 January condemning political machinations within the ruling party that led to the choice of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as candidate for the forthcoming presidential elections. The SSS agents returned in the afternoon to seal the premises, seize the mobile phones of everyone present and to search the offices. After finding what they were looking for, they left the ransacked premises along with the

managing director. The three journalists were finally released in the middle of the night, but they were forced to reveal the whereabouts of Danladi Ndayebo. He was arrested the following day and held for ten hours, during which he apparently revealed the source of his information.

On the same day, around 15 SSS agents carried out a similar operation against the privately-owned weekly *The Abuja Inquirer* after it carried an article headlined, "Obasanjo-Atiku Face-Off : Coup Fear Grips Nigeria". They spent three hours searching the offices and arrested the editor, Dan Akpovwa, as well as the publication director, Sonde Abbah. They left with 81 CDs, a computer, a list of the entire staff of the newspaper and copies of its latest edition.

The privately-owned *African Independent Television (AIT)* was brutally treated by the SSS for a second successive year when on 17 April a commando stormed its Abuja offices days before the presidential poll and 48 hours after a suspicious fire damaged its Lagos offices. In the Abuja raid, the armed SSS agents ordered all the staff to lie on the ground. Before leaving, they took several tapes which were about to be broadcast, along with one which was currently being shown, about the eight-year history of civilian government under the outgoing president, Olusegun Obasanjo. The same SSS on 11 April forcibly closed the studios of private radio *Link FM* and the television station *GTV*, in Lagos, saying that it was acting on "an order from above".

When not carrying out this kind of operation, the SSS is also the force used by the authorities to make brutal arrests of journalists. This was the case for Jerome Imeime, editor of the privately-owned weekly *Events*, circulating in Uyo, state capital of Akwa Ibom in the south-east, whom the SSS



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arrested while he was at a religious ceremony on 10 October. An eye witness reported that he was beaten up before being taken to an unknown location. He was charged, tried and imprisoned for “sedition” in connection with an article which asserted that the governor, Godswill Akpadio, used public funds to pay personal debts contracted during the election campaign.

EVERYDAY BRUTALITY

The SSS which preys on the media is not the only group perpetrating almost daily brutality against Nigerian journalists. Over-excited groups of political militants, the many uniformed corps in the country and governors’ private militias also represent a threat to the world of the press, from publication directors down to news vendors, particularly in the provinces.

In one example of this, on 23 May, around 100 supporters of a local politician, some of them armed with machetes, stormed and ransacked the premises of *Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS)* in Ibadan in the south-west. Many of the staff fled the brutal onslaught but others found themselves trapped in the offices and at least a dozen employees suffered machete injuries. Most of them were also robbed of their money and mobile phones. Several vehicles in the radio car park were

vandalised and the radio had to stop broadcasting. The attack came after *BCOS* put out an announcement that the state electoral commission had decided to maintain the provincial election date as 24 May, although the date had been contested by the former deputy governor Christopher Alao Akala, a candidate of the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP), which had been engaged for several years in a fratricidal struggle against the outgoing governor, Rasheed Ladoja. In the same town on 11 September, Tope Abiola, editor of the privately-owned daily *Nigeria Tribune* was beaten unconscious by prison guards and police after he arrived to investigate the putting down of a prison uprising at Agadi jail which left nearly 40 inmates dead. These incidents are just a few illustrations of 23 cases of physical assault and 13 arrests of journalists recorded by Reporters Without Borders during 2007.

POOR RECORD

The record of the outgoing president Olusegun Obansajo is a poor one for press freedom with countless beatings of journalists or news vendors at the slightest pretext, newspapers seized from printers, and media bosses regularly imprisoned and charged with “sedition”. The year 2007 was no exception and the clumsily rigged election of his designated successor, does not augur any improvement.



RWANDA

Area: 26,340 sq. km.
Population: 9,464,000.
Languages: Kinyarwanda, French, English, Swahili.
Head of state: Paul Kagame.

Appalling relations persisted between the government and a section of the independent press, especially the more highly critical publications. The strength of government hostility pushed some newspapers into closure. Meanwhile journalist Tatiana Mukakibibi was finally released ... after 11 years in custody.

Even though the government denies it, Rwanda's independent press is forced to live under relentless harassment from the highest levels of the state. President Paul Kagame turned on Emmanuel Niyonteze, a journalist on the bi-monthly *Umuseso*, who questioned him at a press conference at the start of the year about his rapprochement with Ivorian president, Laurent Gbagbo. The state-run press also displayed antagonism towards some media, including the US-run public *Voice of America* (VOA). One journalist on state-owned weekly *Imvaho Nshya*, even called at a 2 February press conference for the closure of VOA, accused of favouring the Rwandan opposition. The government in June 2006 expelled without explanation the correspondent for French public *Radio France Internationale* (RFI), Sonia Rolley, then in November ordered the closure of its transmitter after breaking off diplomatic relations with Paris.

A REVILED NEWSPAPER

A few months later, pressure on the government's *bête noire* *Umuseso*, was ratcheted up to such an extent – repeated threats of prosecution against the press group which owns the paper and government smears against its journalists – that it closed all its publications. Several minister and the army and police spokesmen made very aggressive statements against the privately-owned press in a programme broadcast on 9 September 2007 by state-run *Radio Rwanda* and public *Télévision rwandaise* (TVR). The interior minister announced that the authorities were going to take “steps” against journalists who were trying to “overthrow” the government. He said it was the duty of the police to arrest and detain any journalist who published an official document until they divulged its source, who would in their turn be punished. It was an obvious allusion to *Umuseso*, which had recently carried a classified defence ministry document.

An example of this dreadful climate was the arrest and accusation of rape against the newspaper's editor Gérard Manzi in what appeared to be a frame-up. Manzi was arrested at a bus station in the evening of 22 August, while on his way home after a drink with friends, in the company of a young girl, whom to his concern, he had found alone there just a few moments beforehand. At the police station he was accused of rape, which he denied and asked for the alleged victim to be produced, which police refused to do, saying they no longer knew where she was. He was released one week later, after his lawyer produced witnesses backing up his alibi.

As well as *Umuseso*, all the small-scale newspapers appearing in Kigali also suffered harassment. Jean-Bosco Gasasira, publisher of the independent bi-weekly *Umuvugizi*, was beaten up by thugs at his home on 9 February and was admitted to King Faisal hospital in a critical condition and lay in a coma until 13 February. Gasasira had been subjected to intimidating phone calls since August 2006 and was followed by military intelligence officers. “I received calls from private numbers threatening to beat me to death,” he told Reporters Without Borders. He had refused to provide the authorities with information about the whereabouts of Bonaventure Bizumuremyi, editor of the privately-owned weekly *Umuco*, in hiding after coming in for repeated threats himself. In the face of these accusations, the intelligence services accused *Umuco* and other similar papers of looking for “cheap publicity”. The authorities also criticised the newspaper *Umuvugizi* for condemning, along with *Umuco* and *Umuseso*, cronyism on the part of the economy and finance minister, James Musoni.

THE AFTER-EFFECTS OF THE GENOCIDE

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsis left such a mark on Rwandan society that any criticism of the government is swiftly repressed, sometimes brutally.



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Such was the case when Agnès Nkusi Uwimana, editor of the privately-owned bi-monthly *Umurabyo*, one of the few critical publications in Kigali, was arrested on 12 January and accused of “creating division”, “sectarianism” and “defamation” after publishing an article in which she wrote, “Anyone who kills a Tutsi has problems, but if you kill a Hutu you go free”. She pleaded guilty to all charges at her trial, acknowledged the “enormity of what she had written” and promised to “publish an apology”. The Press High Council, media regulatory body controlled by the government, called for the paper to be closed for three months. The information ministry had not yet confirmed the decision as required by law, when Uwimana Nkusi was arrested. She was released one year later, on 19 January 2008.

Similarly, Congolese academic, Idesbald Byabuze Katabaruka was arrested while lecturing at the Kigali Lay Adventist University (UNILAK) on 16 February in connection with a report critical of the president and the ruling party. The prosecutor told him that he was being charged with “endangering state security”, “segregation” and “sectarianism”. A court in Kagarama on 23 February ordered him to be held in custody for 30 days while awaiting trial. Also professor at the Catholic University of Bukavu in South Kivu, eastern DRC, had just launched *Mashariki News*, a newspaper which had only appeared twice at that point. He was editor for several years of alarming reports on the humanitarian crisis on the Rwanda-Congo border and was co-signatory, on 8 June 2005, of an

article “Rwanda Alert” for the *Missionary Service News Agency (MISNA)* which was fiercely critical of the governance of Rwanda by President Paul Kagame and his ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR) since coming to power in 1994. The two other signatories were an Italian nun and a Congolese nun of the Catholic Missions in eastern DRC. Idesbald Byabuze Katabaruka was released on 21 March, expelled from the country and then declared “persona non grata”.

ACQUITTED AFTER 11 YEARS

The year however ended with some good news. A gacaca (people’s) court after three hours deliberation, acquitted a former journalist on *Radio Rwanda* Tatiana Mukakibibi, on 6 November of “genocide”, “planning and participating in genocide” and “distributing arms” in the Kimegeri area between April and July 1994. She had been officially accused of killing Eugène Bwanamudogo, who made programmes for the agriculture ministry, but she denied it and maintained she had been framed. She was released a few days later ... after 11 years in custody. Tatiana Mukakibibi was a presenter and producer on *Radio Rwanda*. After the genocide, in August 1994, she worked with the priest André Sibomana (former director of *Kinyamateka* and laureate of the 1994 Reporters Without Borders prize, who died in March 1998). She was arrested on 2 October 1996, taken to a collective cell, where she was held in extremely harsh conditions until December 2006.

SOMALIA

Area: 637, 660 sq. km.

Population: 8,445,000.

Language: Somali.

Head of state: Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed.

Africa's deadliest country for journalists, which has been without a stable government since 1991, has had a bleak year. Journalists in Somalia, a country which despite everything has a diverse and robust press, have been targeted by hired killers as well as facing the intolerance of the transitional government.

The litany of murdered journalists punctuated a desolate year for the Somali press. Ali Mohammed Omar, a young presenter on privately-owned *Radio Warsan*, one of the most listened to in the central-western Baidoa region, died after being shot in the head as he returned home on the evening of 16 February 2007. Mohammed Abdullahi Khalif, of *Radio Voice of Peace*, in Galkayo, Puntland, was reporting on arms trafficking in the town on 5 May when he was gunned down by soldiers who had come to recover a weapon which had been stolen from them. Abshir Ali Gabre and Ahmed Hassan Mahad, de *Radio Jowhar*, were killed in an ambush on 15 May against a convoy in which they were travelling of the governor of Moyen-Shabelle, central-south Somalia. They were seized by the assailants, stabbed several times before being finished off with bursts from an assault rifle. Head of the Mogadishu radio station *Capital Voice*, Mahad Ahmed Elmi, was on his way to work on 11 August when he was gunned down with several bullets to the head. Co-founder of *HornAfrik* radio, Ali Iman Sharmarke, was killed in a roadside bomb explosion as he returned from the funeral of a colleague also on 11 August. A journalist on *Radio Banadir*, Abdulkadir Mahad Moallim Kaskey, was killed on 24 August when the minibus in which he was travelling in the countryside in the south-west was raked with gunfire. Finally, the head of another popular Mogadishu radio, Bashir Nur Gedi, of *Radio Shabelle*, was murdered by a commando outside his home in front of his wife and children on 19 October.

In the majority of cases, suspicion falls on Islamist insurgents fighting Ethiopian-backed government forces. Leaders of the Islamic Courts, exiled in Eritrea where they receive government aid and an international platform, mount attacks in Mogadishu against government and Ethiopian interests. Their "military wing", a group of radical militiamen known as the "Shabaab" (Youth), gives ins-

tructions to young irregular hired killers to shoot down "traitors", trade unionists, academics, soldiers and journalists.

A GRUESOME TOLL

The heavy toll for the Somali press reads as follows: Eight dead, four injured, some 50 journalists in exile, and others holed up at home after abandoning their work in fear. To this terrible toll, must be added 53 journalists arrested while doing their job, either in southern Somalia, where the capital Mogadishu is sited, in semi-autonomous Puntland in the north or in the self-proclaimed state of Somaliland in the north-west.

Because not only are Somali journalists victims of political violence into which their country has sunk with the years, but they are also favourite targets for the transitional authorities, who see them as inconvenient witnesses of the chaos which they are unable to control. The culprits are mostly the Somali security forces, who act at will, shrugging off the thin line of law that the federal transitional government is supposed to get respected. Unfair imprisonment is also commonplace. Perhaps the most pertinent illustration is the case of Abdulkadir Mohammed Ashir "Nadara" and Bashir Dirie Nalei, journalists on privately-owned *Universal TV*, and cameraman Hamud Mohamed Osman, arrested on 21 March after a press conference given by President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed because the head of state's entourage considered they had asked an impertinent question. They were only released, on 22 May, thanks to intense international pressure.

In addition to targeted assassinations and arbitrary arrest, one incident was particularly telling. A unit of the Somali security forces attempted to enter the premises of *Radio Shabelle* on the morning of 18 September, after a grenade had been thrown at

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a patrol in the area. Soldiers raked the building with gunfire, particularly the floor housing the radio studios, breaking all the windows. They then besieged the building for several hours before authorising the evacuation of the staff. *The Radio Shabelle* studios are located in the centre of Mogadishu, not far from Bakara market which has become the insurgents' stronghold. The area is particularly prone to clashes and attacks. The owner of the building is also a member of the Ayr clan which is notoriously hostile to the transitional government.

IRRITABLE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Journalists' freedoms were also targeted by the authorities in the semi-autonomous Puntland region, former stronghold of the president of the transitional government, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed. The region's sea coast is used for trade in arms and refugees to the Gulf states. Small criminal gangs, formed on a clan basis and backed by their own militia, share this very lucrative business between them. As a result, the north of Puntland has become the hunting ground of bands of kidnapers, who have turned abduction and piracy into a business. Two aid workers were kidnapped in May before being released after negotiations with their captors and traditional chiefs. French freelance cameraman Gwenlaouen Le Gouil was kidnapped on 16 December while reporting for the French-German channel Arte. He was released on Christmas Eve. The demands of the kidnapers, a gang which organises the smuggling of people into Saudi Arabia via Yemen, were purely criminal.

Elsewhere, relying on police pressure, local authorities attempted to protect the apparent stability of the region, spared Islamist agitation but shaken by territorial rivalries with Somaliland. Against this background, unwanted witnesses have been ruthlessly treated. Independent journalists Mohamed Gahnug and Faysal Jaama were detained for several days at the end of September in the disputed town of Las Anod, after taking photos of the Puntland security forces during clashes with the Somaliland army. Abdifatah Dahir Jeyte, producer and presenter on privately-owned *Radio Voice of Peace* in Bossaso, was placed under arrest on 16 July by around 30 agents of Puntland intelligence services, who raided his office. He was freed two days later only because of a determined international campaign and the fact that around 20 colleagues and the deputy interior minister, demonstrated in front of the headquarters of the intelligence services to protest at his imprisonment.

Also anxious to preserve its reputation as "haven of peace" on the edge of Somali anarchy, Somaliland is at loggerheads with the private press, particularly the newspaper *Haatuf*. Its publication director, Yusuf Abdi Gabobe, its editor, Ali Abdi Dini, and Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim, correspondent in the north-western region of Awdal served three months in prison between January and March. The government took proceedings against them for a series of articles exposing favouritism in government appointments and the use of official vehicles for private purposes. They were originally sentenced to two years in prison and were released after extensive campaigns by colleagues and international organisations.

SUDAN

Area: 2,505,810 sq. km.
Population: 37,707,000.
Languages: Arabic, English.
Head of state: Omar Hassan al-Bashir.

The Sudanese press appearing in Khartoum was once again in 2007 a regular target for the security services who will not allow journalists to get in the way of government action. Several arrests and a generally bad atmosphere do not however detract from the fact that newspapers and civil society play an active part in ongoing debates, including on the crisis in Darfur.

With around 30 independent daily papers across the range of political tendencies, and an active and critical civil society, Sudan is a paradox. Its poor reputation on the international scene, mainly because of its intransigence and complicity in the killings in Darfur, has tended to mask the robustness of the media in Khartoum.

As in many armed conflicts worldwide, the crisis in Darfur sets both the national and international media complex difficulties in trying to cover it effectively. The intrinsic problems – the multiplicity of armed factions, absence of a “front line” and the lack of distinction between combatants and civilians, the inhospitable terrain and so on – are exacerbated by a “bureaucratic corral” thrown around it by the authorities in Khartoum in a bid to “regulate” the work of journalists. A whole raft of administrative and security obstacles hamper everything from obtaining a visa, to getting a special “travel permit” for Darfur, and also ban access to camps for the internally displaced. Reporters Without Borders, following an on-the-spot investigation, released a report on the difficult situation faced by Sudanese and foreigners journalists, highlighting these obstacles but also the pluralism, robustness and rigour of the newspapers in the capital.

The Sudanese written press, which boasts a genuine pluralism, reflects the voices of Sudanese human rights activists, university researchers and community life in general – voices which struggle to get a hearing outside of Sudan. This no easy thing to do; in a country which is so divided and in which so much is at stake. Faisal el-Bagir, of the privately-owned weekly *al-Midan* and correspondent in Sudan for Reporters Without Borders, along with Abdel Moneim Suleiman, al-Haj Warraq, al-Tahir Satti and Rabbah al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, all four of the privately-owned Arabic-language daily *al-*

Sahafa, all received death threats on 4 December apparently in connection with their reports on Darfur. Abdel Moneim Suleiman said he received threats by telephone from Chad from man who told him that someone if Sudan had offered 222,000 dollars for him to kill all five journalists. The caller told him they were targets because of their opposition to the government and their support for the deployment of an international force in Darfur.

NEWSPAPERS IN THE FIRING LINE

The privately-owned daily *al-Sudani*, an independent publication which is highly critical of the Khartoum government has been a target for the authorities. After it carried allegations against the justice minister, officials went to the printers on 16 May and seized plates of the edition which was about to appear and handed the paper’s management a letter from the prosecutor’s office ordering its closure. A leader article written by the editor that day had accused the minister, Mohamed Ali al-Mardhi, of “lying in a money-laundering case” which had been brought before the courts. Both the publisher Mahgub Urwa and the editor Osman Mirghani were held in custody for two and three days respectively, from 17-20 May, before being released without charge.

The closure of *al-Sudani* typifies one of those most blatant obstacles to press freedom in Sudan. It was a step taken unilaterally by the government despite the fact that there is regulatory body for the press, which it completely by-passed. The government yet again used one of its favourite weapons, Article 130 of the criminal law, the validity of which is contested by the entire profession as well as the National Press Council, which regulates the media. This ambiguous piece of legislation designed to prevent “influence on ongoing legal proceedings”, had also

SUDAN

been used against the paper on 1st February was when it was closed “indefinitely” by the justice ministry for referring to the 2006 murder of the editor of the daily *al-Wifaq*, Mohamed Taha, breaching a government-imposed blackout on the case on the pretext of “maintaining public order”. The government bowed to pressure from professional organisations and climbed down 48 hours later. Mahgub Urwa and Nureddin Medani, deputy editor of *al-Sudani*, were imprisoned in November, for 11 days, after being sentenced for “defamation” of the intelligence services on 18 November and refusing to pay a fine of 10,000 Sudanese pounds (3,500 Euros), “to get the government to understand the injustice of imprisonment for an expression of opinion” Mahgub Urwa said as he left prison.

Other newspapers have also found themselves at loggerheads with often bad-tempered authorities. Security services, using the old tactics of Sudan’s political police, raided the printers of *al-Midan* on 28 August and seized all 15,000 copies of the freshly-printed edition. No official reason was given for the raid. But Reporters Without Borders’

correspondent, Faisal el-Bagir, believed it could be linked to publication of articles condemning the seizure a week early of the privately-owned Arabic-language *al-Rai al-Chaab*. He thought the seizure could also be intended to put the newspaper under financial pressure by depriving it of income. Six independent dailies had articles censored by the security services on 20-21 August about the arrest of people suspected of fomenting attacks against Western embassies.

EMBARRASSING WITNESSES

Sudanese security services have no hesitation in arresting journalists who might witness abuse. Alfatih Abdullah, of *al-Sudani*, Qazafi Abdulmotalab, of *al-Ayam*, Abuobaida Awad, of *Rai-Alshaab*, and Abulgasim Farahna, of *Alwan*, spent a week in custody after they were arrested on 13 June, while they were on their way to cover a demonstration against the construction of a dam at Kijbar, in the Dongola region in the north of the country, during which police opened fire, leaving four dead and at least ten wounded.



ZIMBABWE

Area: 390,760 sq. km.
Population: 13,228,000.
Languages: English, Shona, Ndebele.
Head of state: Robert Mugabe.

For the past five years southern Africa's former "bread basket" has been plunged into a deep economic and political crisis, dragging down one of Africa's most robust media in its repressive wake. Since 2002, the daily lot of Zimbabwean journalists has consisted of permanent surveillance, police brutality and injustice.

Zimbabwe's press today lies in ruins. If, in 2007, Reporters Without Borders has recorded fewer press freedom violations than in previous years, it is because there are very few journalists left to arrest, newspapers to close or foreign correspondents to expel. A handful of privately-owned publications do still appear, but under tight surveillance, forced to come to terms with the presidential party. The journalists who can still work in the country protect their accreditation, renewed each year by the all-powerful Media and Information Commission (MIC). They face two years in prison if caught working without this precious document. The management of the few remaining private titles to still appear are under heavy pressure to adopt the political line of the ruling party and to prevent the more critical journalists from working. No foreign reporter can legally work in Zimbabwe, without fear of arrest, being paraded like a trophy and expelled after high-speed sentencing.

However when in 2002, President Robert Mugabe oversaw the passing of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), southern Africa's former "breadbasket" saw an unprecedented flowering of the media. People fell on the newspapers every morning, in particular the privately-owned *The Daily News* which was headed by experienced journalists, carried reliable news and was irreverent towards the government. After being closed at the end of a run of perverse legal shenanigans, it has been fighting to reappear ever since. Despite several legal rulings in its favour, the authorities have always found bureaucratic methods to block it.

In any event, the life of independent journalists has become impossible. Two episodes reveal interference in the media by Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) with disastrous results. The independent-minded editor of the privately-

owned weekly the *Financial Gazette* (*FinGaz*), Sunsley Chamunorwa, was blocked from entering his office on 13 March and told that he had been dismissed without notice. The newspaper has belonged to the CIO since 2001, after a financial operation using the governor of the Central Bank, Gideon Gono, as cover. "The editor managed to hang on until now because Gono refused to bend to pressure from the ruling party and the CIO, which complained about the party's editorial line, which supposedly harmed the party and favoured the MDC", [Movement for Democratic Change, the main opposition party], a source at the paper who requested anonymity, told Reporters Without Borders. In another similar incident on 7 March, Tichaona Chifamba, CEO of the publishers of the *Daily Mirror*, announced to staff that the paper was being forced to stop appearing because of a financial crisis. The CIO had taken control of the paper in 2004, after driving out its founder Ibbo Mandaza. Since then, sales had fallen to a circulation of only 2,000 copies a day and debts amounted to 500 million Zimbabwe dollars (about 1.5 million Euros).

DEMONSTRATION ON 11 MARCH

From the political point of view, the year's most significant event occurred on 11 March when police brutally put down a "prayer meeting" which was organised by the Save Zimbabwe Campaign (SZC), comprising churches, opposition parties, non-governmental organisations, trade unions and student bodies opposed to the Mugabe government. A number of opposition activists and leading figures including Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara, leaders of the two MDC factions, were arrested and beaten. Tsvangirai Mukwazhi, a freelance photographer working for the US news agency *Associated Press* (AP), and a freelance journalist also working for AP, Tendai Musiyu, were arrested and then released after two days in custody.



ZIMBABWE

Two weeks later on 31 March a shock went through the profession after the body was found of freelance cameraman Edward Chikomba, former contributor to state-run *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)* two days after he was snatched by unknown abductors, suspected of being intelligence agents. A former colleague said that Chikomba had been accused of selling footage of Morgan Tsvangirai to foreign media, which showed the head injuries he had suffered as a result of being beaten up in custody. Since leaving the production team of the programme *Vision 30*, put out by *ZBC* until 2001, Chikomba had continued to make independent films for individuals or media, particularly abroad. There was no proper investigation of his murder.

The following day police arrested Gift Phiri, contributor to the privately-owned London-based weekly *The Zimbabwean*, whom they been looking for since his paper published the names of police officers and politicians implicated in a round-up of opposition figures, human rights activists and journalists. The journalist found it difficult to sit down, walk or stand upright at his trial six days later, because of blows inflicted while in custody.

Even if, at the end of the year, amendments to the AIPPA made it more liberal, the authorities continued to crack down hard on those it considered to be “agents of the West”. The intelligence services drew up a black list of at least 15 journalists working in the independent press ahead of 2008

presidential and legislative elections. On 26 September, Zimbabwe’s independent press published a fax of a page with an official government letterhead and dated June 2007 which under the heading “targeted journalists” gave the names of 15 media figures that “are to be placed under strict surveillance and taken in on the various dates set. They’re working hand in hand with hostile anti-Zimbabwean western governments.”

If democratic reforms are to be undertaken in Zimbabwe, they would have to dismantle a system of repression, which has been constantly honed by technological advances. One such example came on 6 August when President Mugabe promulgated the “Interception of Communications Bill”, allowing the government and the police to intercept, read or listen into emails and mobile phone communications, without any obligation to open legal proceedings. This law strengthens the paranoia of the political and police apparatus and demonstrates how far government intolerance can lead. This was illustrated when a group of plain-clothes police turned up in the wings of the “Theatre in the Park” during a performance on 28 September of *The Final Push* by playwright Daniel Maphosa, taking a satirical look at eight years of political crisis in Zimbabwe. During an interval, police bundled actors Sylvanos Mudzvova and Anthony Tongani into a waiting truck. Independent journalist James Jemwa, who was filming the play, was arrested in his turn when he challenged police about the arrest of the two actors.