

War of words with Nigerian army lands journalists in jail

The International Press Centre (IPC), Lagos-Nigeria has described the invasion of the premises of Premium Times in Abuja and the subsequent arrest of its publisher, Dapo Olorunyomi and the judiciary correspondent, Evelyn Okakwu, by armed police men on the night of January 19, 2017, as an unacceptable assault on freedom of the press.



Evelyn Okakwu and Dapo Olorunyomi

The director of IPC, Lanre Arogundade, said in a statement, that the attack on *Premium Times* – as well as the harassment of other journalists in recent times – is completely antithetical to democratic values and norms at the core of which are the rights to free speech and media freedom.

“Any government that makes the press its enemy will invariably turn to be the enemy of the people, as was recently the case in The Gambia where Yaya Jammeh was rejected by the people due to his constant attacks on the press, among other human rights violations,” the IPC director warned.

According to Arogundade, the police should not allow itself to be used to settle scores by vested interests – in this case the army authorities – who have already made public their disagreement with *Premium Times* over certain publications by the media outlet pertaining to the office of the Chief of Army Staff.

“The police should, however, make public its reasons for the raid of *Premium Times* and the arrest of Olorunyomi and Okakwu if they believe that it is not connected with the dispute with the army authorities,” he said further.

Arogundade advised the army authorities to seek legal redress or make use of the instrumentality of the media regulatory agencies, should they be convinced that there had been professional misconduct on the part of *Premium Times* and its editors.

The IPC director said, however, that the organisation welcomes the fact that the police authorities promptly released the arrested publisher and reporter following public outcry.

The IPC director also said that recent developments have made it imperative to have a national stakeholders' dialogue involving media institutions, the security and law enforcement agencies, the media regulatory agencies, etc., to discuss measures for safeguarding press freedom and the sustenance of democratic values.

Source: This statement was originally published on ipcng.org on 20 January 2017.

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