

Cote d'Ivoire newspaper suspended, journalists threatened

The Laurent Gbagbo-controlled National Press Council (CNP) on 18 March 2011 suspended the pro-Ouattara daily *Le Jour Plus*, for publishing statements by top officials of the government of Alassane Ouattara, the internationally recognised president of Côte d'Ivoire. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)'s correspondent reported that *Le Jour Plus* has been banned from publishing for 26 days.

According to the CNP, the newspaper has been insulting and "humiliating" the "Head of State" (Laurent Gbagbo), with consistent publications of statements from top officials of Ouattara's government to the extent of referring to Dominique Ouattara, wife of Alassane Ouattara, as the first lady of Côte d'Ivoire.

The correspondent said the newspaper has been exposing atrocities of security elements loyal to Gbagbo, which did not please the CNP. On March 9 for instance, *Le Jour Plus* reported on the killing on March 8 of 10 people including seven women and a child in an Abidjan neighbourhood of Abobo, while they were demonstrating in favour of Ouattara. The killings were allegedly perpetrated by agents of the Anti-Riot Squad and the Republican Guards.

This is the third time that *Le Jour Plus* has been sanctioned by the CNP since the members assumed office on February 9 under controversial circumstances. The council had earlier imposed a fine of one million CFA francs (about US\$2000) on the newspaper over an article by a free-thinker that was critical of Gbagbo. This was followed by another two million (about US\$4000) fine for publishing photographs of alleged "barbaric acts" by the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) in the towns of Koumassi and Treichville.

In a 17 March press statement, the *Le Jour Plus* team vowed to continue the fight despite the ban so "that democracy will triumph" in the country.

Other incidents

In a related development, the management of Les Editions Nouveau Réveil, publishers of *Le Nouveau Réveil* and *Le Repère* dailies, announced on March 17 that they were starting an online version on <http://www.abidjan.net>. The move, according to the publishers, is intended to seek a solution to the frequent banning and blocking of the distribution of the pro-Ouattara newspapers by elements of pro-Gbagbo forces. The www.abidjan.net site is the news site most visited by Ivoirians both at home and abroad.

In a separate incident, on 15 March, the FDS, loyal to Gbagbo, renewed their threats and attacks on the media and journalists resulting in *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan*, an independent daily newspaper not appearing on the newsstands on March

MFWA's correspondent reported that the Anti-Riot Squad (BAE) wing of the FDS surrounded the neighbourhood of the newspaper's head office in Angré (Cocody) on March 15 between the hours of 16 and 17 GMT. This affected the operations of the newspaper and the movement of the journalists within and outside of the premises. While Alafé Wakili, *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan*'s publisher, and the other staff members within the premises were forced out through an emergency door, Patrice Pohé, its editor in chief, and two technicians who were outside the premises could not enter the office due to the intimidating presence of the BAE personnel.

Threats

L'Intelligent d'Abidjan was among a coalition of newspapers that suspended publishing in early March to protest the intimidation and harassment allegedly from Gbagbo authorities. In the wake of the political crises, it has received several threats.

In another development, on 15 March, Koffi Djaha Germain, a journalist working for the independent daily *L'Inter* newspaper, was arrested and manhandled by elements of the Republican Guards following his inability to produce his national identity card upon request. Koffi was accused of "talking too much" in his attempt to justify why he did not have his card. According to the correspondent, the journalist, who was detained for nearly two hours, was also molested by one of the guards. Koffi was later taken to the hospital.

Earlier on February 20, three journalists were blocked from accessing the northern part of the country by the FDS in Tiébissou (middle belt) of the country. The journalists, Hilaire Zon of France 24, Bakary Gbon Coulibaly of TV5 and Traoré Médandjé of Ivorian daily *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan* newspaper, had gone to the area to cover a meeting of Prime Minister Guillaume Soro.

Source: Media Foundation for West Africa