

Journalists detained, harassed, beaten covering Congo protests

Authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo should cease harassing and detaining journalists and should allow them to cover protests and other events of public interest without interference, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



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Security forces harassed, detained, or beat at least 18 journalists across the country on July 31 as they covered [anti-government protests](#), according to media reports and Congolese press freedom advocates. Security forces released all of the journalists by the end of the day, but deleted many of the journalists' photographs and recordings first.

Security forces arrested more than 100 people in the nationwide protests demanding that President Joseph Kabila leave office by the end of the year, according to [media reports](#).

"Detaining journalists and deleting their photographs and recordings is a crude attempt at censoring news of protests and sends a chilling message to the press in the Democratic Republic of Congo," said CPJ Africa Program coordinator, Angela Quintal. "Journalists must be permitted to report freely, without fear of being arrested or harassed by security services."

[According](#) to the DRC Association of Online Media (MILRDC), an independent advocacy group, security services on July 31 detained at least seven journalists in the capital, Kinshasa, including: Pascal Mulegwa, a reporter for Turkey's Anadolu news agency; Christine Tshibuyi, a reporter for [ACTUALITE.CD](#); Emmanuela Zondi, a reporter for Vox Congo; and journalists for BBC Afrique, Reuters, and China's Xinhua News Agency, whom the association did not name.

"All the journalists [at the demonstration] were subject to immediate arrest without explanation. We stayed inside a school under police supervision," one of the journalists detained in Kinshasa told CPJ, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

Goma detentions

At least four journalists were detained in the eastern city of Goma on July 31, including: the BBC Afrique's Ley Uwera; Daniel Chube Ngorombi, of Radio France Internationale's Swahili service; Etienne Mosengo, a reporter for the community radio station Radio Télé du Graben Beni (RTGB); and Justin Kabunga, a reporter for *Congo Synthèse*, according to [media reports](#). Uwera [wrote on Twitter](#) that security services deleted material she had gathered reporting on the protests.

The same day, security forces in the northeastern city of Butembo detained at least two journalists - Radio Soleil journalist Merveille Kakule Saliboko and George Kisando, who works for the radio station of the Catholic University of Graben (UCG) - according to the journalists and [media reports](#). Officers seized Saliboko's phone, and, as of August 2, 2017, had not returned it to him, [he wrote](#) in a blog post.

Security forces in the eastern city of Bukavu also [detained](#) at least two journalists - Esther Lubago and Christian Safari, both from the private television station Canal Futur - Lubago told CPJ. Security forces deleted the journalist's recording of the protests before releasing her, she told CPJ. Josué Musole, of the community broadcaster Radio Nenolauzima, and BBC reporter Byobe Malenga individually told CPJ that security forces beat them as they were on their way to cover the July 31 demonstration in Bukavu.

"The commander ordered the policemen to search us and to take everything: camera, recorder," Malenga told CPJ. "They started to beat us."

In the southeastern city of Lubumbashi, at least one journalist from the UN-funded Radio Okapi was detained, according to [media reports](#) and the journalist, who spoke to CPJ on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. CPJ's repeated phone calls to Mwana Mputu, spokesperson for the national police, went unanswered.

The Congolese government has in recent weeks sought to control independent reporting. The Ministry of Communication and Media on July 12, 2017, issued new regulations restricting foreign journalists' ability to report on socio-economic issues and politics, as well as "strategic locations" such as military barracks, telecommunication installations, and embassies, according to directives seen by CPJ and a statement by the Congolese press freedom group [Journaliste en Danger](#). The orders also require that foreign journalists obtain government permission to cross regional borders within the country.

In a separate incident, on July 25, 2017, three men in plainclothes who identified themselves as military intelligence officers assaulted and briefly detained two Agence France-Presse journalists reporting on a doctors' strike in Kinshasa, [AFP reported](#). An officer accused the journalists of taking images aimed at "smearing the country" abroad, but released them after roughly half an hour, according to [AFP](#).

Source: [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) (CJP).

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