

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/chad-government-minister-insists-that-05-07-2012,42961.html>

Africa - Chad

Reassuring words?

Government minister insists that no journalist is being targeted

5 July 2012

"Neither **Eric Topona** nor any other journalist is being targeted by the government," Chad's information and communication minister and government spokesman, Hassan Sylla Bakari, told Reporters Without Borders during an interview on 3 July in Paris.

Reporters Without Borders, which requested the meeting, voiced its concern about media freedom in Chad following reports of threats to several journalists and to *Le blog de Makaila*, an online publication by a Chadian citizen living in exile.

Last week, Reporters Without Borders spoke by phone with land affairs minister Jean-Bernard Padaré, who has been accused by several Chadian newspapers of targeting Topona and other journalists such as **Eloi Miandadji** and **Déli Sainzoumi Nestor** who used to work for *La Voix*, a newspaper partly owned by Padaré.

Sylla tried to be reassuring. "Media freedom is well established in our country and we don't question it," he said. "No journalist is in prison in Chad and the media are very outspoken. There are fierce attacks on the government in the media, but criticism is normal. I have no problem with this."

Reporters Without Borders would like to think that the information minister can be trusted but is nonetheless concerned.

"We are worried by the recent reports that we have received," the organization said. "Chad's image would be badly affected if it were confirmed that Chadian officials do not hesitate to threaten journalists nowadays in N'Djaména or adopt sanctions designed to make their lives impossible.

"Political competition is healthy in a democracy but it must be expressed in the political arena. Personal or political differences between individuals must not spill over into their professional lives or, still less, endanger their safety. It would be intolerable if leading figures were trying to silence journalists for the sole reason that they regard them as a nuisance."

Reporters Without Borders urges all those concerned to act responsibly. Government ministers must ensure respect for civil liberties. Journalists must act professionally and refrain from gratuitous attacks.

Is Topona being targeted?

Employed by national radio and TV broadcaster *ONRTV*, Topona has just been appointed as head of *ONRTV*'s regional station in the northeastern city of Fada. He says his obligations in N'Djaména, where he is acting general secretary of the Union of Chadian Journalists (UJT), prevent him from taking up this provincial posting, which he regards as punishment designed to give him problems.

There have also been several disturbing incidents, which he suspects were deliberate attempts on his life. He was knocked down by a motorcycle in N'Djaména on 24 June and was pursued by a car with a Cameroonian licence plate earlier in the month. These incidents have reinforced his impression that he is in danger.

There has also been an incident involving **Ahmadou Bouba Bondaba**, a journalist who was fired last year as *La Voix*'s accountant and who now freelances for the newspaper *Abba Garde*. He was attacked and beaten on the evening of 2 July, sustaining a fracture to a collarbone that needed several hours of treatment in a hospital. His phone and motorcycle were also taken.

In the afternoon before the attack, he said he was threatened by Padaré – the land affairs minister and leading *La Voix* shareholder – during a phone conversation. According to Bondaba, Padaré asked him to stop working for *Abba Garde*. Padaré is currently embroiled in a legal dispute with *Moussaye Avenir de la Tchiré*, the publisher of *Abba Garde*, which was launched in December 2011.

Both Topona and Eloi Miandadji, another former *La Voix* journalist, also regard themselves as being directly threatened by Padaré.

As Reporters Without Borders knows Padaré well, having helped him to defend *La Voix* in 2009, when he was its lawyer, it called him in order to express its surprise about these reports and to get his reaction.

Padaré said that he had “nothing to do with these so-called threats,” that he was “very committed to freedom” and that he would never be responsible for acts of intimidation against media personnel or for violations of media freedom.

Reporters Without Borders asked Sylla about rumours that Chadian officials wanted to have *Le blog de Makaila* closed down because of its criticism of the government.

He replied: “If a government gets to that point, it has nothing more to do and should just resign. Believe me, this is definitely not our intention. We do not close media either in N'Djaména or abroad. We have other concerns – digitalization, training journalists and so on. We have a broader vision. I want to leave my name in good shape.”

Three community radio stations “returned” to state ownership

Sylla was also asked about presidential decree No. 410 of 20 March transferring the ownership of three community radio stations – at Moussoro (Barh El Gazel), Fada (Ennedi) and Kyabe (Moyen-Chari) – to ONRTV. He said these stations had been launched with state support and that the state wanted to turn them into “regional ONRTV stations because they had ceased to be used.”

The Chadian journalistic community and several observers had interpreted the move as indicative of a desire to take control of privately-owned media at the expense of freedom of information.

Photo : Hassan Sylla, information and communication minister (Ph. Goldegué / ATP)

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