

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/cote-d-ivoire-control-of-news-and-information-01-04-2011,39936.html>

Africa - Côte d'Ivoire

Regime change

Control of news and information part of battle for Abidjan. RTI reportedly broadcasting from mobile truck

3 April 2011

03.04.2011 – 12 noon – RTI reportedly broadcasting from mobile truck

While yesterday's resumption of broadcasting by state-owned *Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne* (RTI) gave the impression that its headquarters had been recovered by forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, various local sources have told Reporters Without Borders that the Gbagbo camp could be broadcasting the RTI signal from an Abidjan house using a mobile broadcast truck.

This is also what Capt. Kouakou Léon Alla, the spokesman of the government of Gbagbo rival Alassane Ouattara, claims in communiqué, a copy of which has been obtained by Reporters Without Borders.

"The Prime Minister and defence minister [Guillaume Soro] assures all Ivorians and the international community that it is by using a mobile truck that the Gbagbo clan pirates are trying to revive RTI in order to continue their propaganda for the destruction of Côte d'Ivoire," says communiqué No. 030 of 02/04/11/CAB-PM-MD/PP, signed by Alla.

"This vehicle is the target of a search by the [pro-Ouattara] Republican Forces and will be destroyed as soon as possible," the communiqué continues. "RTI's actual installations are no longer functional."

The Gbagbo government's spokesman, Ahoua Don Mello, and its foreign minister, Alcide Djédjé, deny these claims and insist that their camp still has control of RTI.

Several sources who live near the RTI headquarters in the Abidjan neighbourhood of Cocody, told Reporters Without Borders that there was no one currently in the building.

President Gbagbo gave RTI a mobile broadcasting truck worth 1 billion CFA francs in February 2009, along with two Fly-Away mobile TV signal satellite uplinks.

"Propaganda and public appeals to Ivorians to mobilize are compounding such rumours and mysteries of the past 72 hours as who controls RTI and where Laurent Gbagbo is," Reporters Without Borders said. "The fierce street fighting is being accompanied by an all-out communication and information war. We caution all the forces involved against using the media to issue messages of hate against opposing forces or civilian groups."

02.04.2011 – 7pm – Held by pro-Gbagbo forces, RTI urges supporters to protect presidential palace

Soldiers loyal to Laurent Gbagbo appealed on the air on state-owned *Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne* (RTI) late this morning for troops to mobilize to "protect the republic's institutions," effectively

confirming their control of the station. Described as “Communiqué No. 1 from the support point” and read by a soldier accompanied by 10 others, it urged soldiers to report to five Abidjan-based units.

During a 1 p.m. news broadcast, Damana Pickas, an adviser to the president of the pro-Gbagbo Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), urged the “Young Patriots” to take to the streets and converge on the presidential residence in the Abidjan district of Cocody and the presidential palace in Plateau.

He also urged the “Young Patriots” to block two bridges linking the southern districts of Abidjan with Plateau.

In a text message at the bottom of the screen, Gbagbo youth minister Charles Blé Goudé, who is also head of the “Young Patriots,” urged the population to go about its everyday activities, claiming that Abidjan was under the control of pro-Gbagbo forces.

02.04.2011 - 11am - RTI resumes broadcasting, unclear who is in control

The state-owned national broadcaster *Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI)* resumed broadcasting last night in Abidjan, transmitting footage of Laurent Gbagbo being sworn in after the 28 November presidential election and then patriotic music.

The content belied suggestions that forces loyal to Gbagbo opponent Alassane Ouattara were in control of *RTI* but it did not prove that the pro-Gbagbo forces had regained full control, as Gbagbo's foreign minister, Alcide Djédjé, claimed yesterday.

Sources told Reporters Without Borders that it could have been just archive footage that was pre-set to play in the absence of any current programming.

At this point, it continues to be very hard to determine whether one camp or the other has effective control of the *RTI* building and its equipment. They are located in the Abidjan district of Cocody, where there has been intense fighting since 31 March.

Read the Reporters Without Borders article [“Big battle for small screen in Abidjan”](#) that was published in French in *SlateAfrique.fr* yesterday.

01.04.2011 - Control of news and information part of battle for Abidjan

Reporters Without Borders fears that the ongoing military battle for control of Côte d'Ivoire's business capital, Abidjan, could be accompanied by atrocities and massacres. It urges all parties to protect civilians and hopes that peace will be quickly restored.

Amid a climate of confusion in which information is hard to confirm, Reporters Without Borders also warns against any score-settling and reprisals within the highly-polarized Ivorian media. The suspension or disruption of media activities is likely to encourage rumours and disinformation.

Forces loyal to Alassane Ouattara announced that they took control of the Abidjan headquarters of state-owned *Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI)* last night. Since then, its signal has been cut. As a result of the chaos in Abidjan, no newspaper was printed or distributed today.

The continuing crisis has fuelled a spate of rumours, denials and propagandistic statements. The following entry was posted on Laurent Gbagbo's blog at 5 a.m. today:

Gbagbo appears on RTI, in good shape.

At a time when mad rumours encouraged by the Ouattara terrorists, are claiming that the Abidjan government is on its knees, Ivorians were able to see President Laurent Gbagbo at his home, thanks to RTI. The relaxed president was surrounded by aides, friends and members of his family. The president was in a good mood and was conversing with everyone, while the so-called international press was gleefully predicting the worst for his government.

The doors of Abidjan's main prison were opened early yesterday and all the inmates were freed. They included [two *Télé Notre Patrie* journalists, Abou Sanogo and Gnahoré Charly, who had been held since 28 January.](#)

"I left the prison at 7:50 a.m.," Charly said. "All the other prisoners also left (...) We were in our cells when, at around 6:30 a.m., we heard shooting. The shooting lasted until 7:10 a.m. Then we heard shouts of joy. We went down and saw that the prison's gates had been opened. We did not wait to ask why. We just left."

Charly added: "There had been no guards in the prison since yesterday [Wednesday] evening. Once outside, we saw members of the 'invisible commando' around the prison but no members of the FDS [the pro-Gbagbo army]."

Photo : AFP
