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TOGO

Appeal for the reopening of the media

15 February 2005

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The announcement, on 5 February 2005, of the death of President Gnassingbé Eyadéma, in power since 1967, has prompted a new wave of intimidation against the independent media and opposition parties, aimed at muzzling all dissident voices during the period of transition of power.

While all public demonstrations are banned for a period of two months, officially to respect the period of mourning decreed by the Togolese authorities, several private radio stations have suffered strong pressures from the authorities. To date, five radio stations have been closed for intending to undermine public order, and directors of the media and journalists who have disseminated information on the current situation, or who have organised round-table discussions or phone-ins, have suffered threats and intimidation.

Chronology of attacks on the media

6 February

- In the late evening, the President of the *Haute Autorité de l'audiovisuel et de la communication (HAAC)*, High Audio-Visual and Communication Authority, personally visits the private radio station *Kanal FM* to demand that a programme broadcast during the day should not be broadcast again. Since the death of the head of state was announced, this radio station has broadcast several programmes mentioning the articles of the Constitution that set out the procedures to be followed if the Presidency is left vacant.

7 February

- The government announces a ban on all street demonstrations for a period of two months.
- The radio station *Nana FM* receives a series of threatening and anonymous telephone calls, after broadcasting an appeal by six opposition parties calling on the Togolese to observe two civic strike days “to express their rejection of the military coup”.
- In the afternoon, directors of *Nana FM* are summoned by the HAAC President, who criticises them for giving too much air time to the opposition.
- M. Pitang Tchalla, Minister of Communication and Civic Education, summons international media correspondents to Lomé and publicly accuses Radio France International (RFI) of having “launched a campaign of disinformation and destabilisation”.

8 February

- The HAAC President calls the directors of *Kanal FM* to demand they immediately halt a round-table discussion on the current situation.

- In the morning, the HAAC President twice asks directors of *Radio Nostalgie* to suspend transmission of a programme.
- In the afternoon, two gendarmes appear at the offices of *Radio Nostalgie* which, since Monday 7 February, has regularly broadcast special programmes dedicated to the current situation. The two armed gendarmes ask, in a menacing tone, to speak to the host of the debate being broadcast who they accuse of insulting their leader, President Eyadéma. Forcing their way into the station, the two gendarmes verbally abuse the journalists present and threaten them before leaving the place.
- The two RFI transmitters stop broadcasting on FM for a few days, officially because of a technical breakdown.
- The RFI's special correspondent is refused a visa entry at the Benin border, although other foreign journalists are allowed to enter Togo.

10 February

- Local authorities order gendarmes to seize broadcasting material belonging to the private radio station, *Radio Lumière*, at Aneho, (50 km from the capital, Lomé) for "*incitement to hatred and violence*". A programme with a representative of the Togolese Human Rights League was scheduled to discuss the constitution in the morning.
- All directors of private radio stations in Lomé are called to a meeting with the HAAC President, in the presence of the Togolese Armed Forces communications officer. During this meeting, the latter singles out certain private radio stations and openly threatens them. He says that: "*We have targeted certain stations that I am going to name, Nana FM, Radio Nostalgie, Kanal FM and Radio Maria. We want you to know that we have the means to put an end to this. It is up to each of you to act responsibly.*"

11 February

- The authorities order the closure of four stations, *Kanal FM, Nana FM, Radio Nostalgie* and *TV7*, for one month, officially for tax reasons and in spite of the payment of charges made or offered by several directors of these stations. These four radio stations and one television channel are accused of public order offences for broadcasting information about the current situation.
- The directors of these radio stations realise they can no longer receive calls to the usual telephone numbers, preventing the public from contacting them.

Following a call by the six opposition parties, demonstrations have taken place in Lomé, notably on 12 and 14 February. These gatherings were violently repressed, leaving four dead, according to official sources.

While recognising the state's right to ensure respect for public order, Amnesty International believes that this intimidation, these threats and censorship represent unacceptable attacks on the freedom of expression guaranteed by regional and international treaties ratified by Togo. For example, article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that "*everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, or through any other media of his choice*". Restrictions on the right to the freedom of expression are limited and must be both necessary and provided for by law.

As there is no demonstrable reason for closing the radio stations for a period of one month, Amnesty International considers that this measure is disproportionate and that its only objective is to censor the media and prevent it disseminating dissenting opinions of the government.

Please send your appeals, in French, or in your own language, to the addresses below,

- protesting against closure of the private radio stations *Kanal FM, Nana FM, Radio Nostalgie, Radio Lumière* and the television channel TV7, which is an unacceptable and disproportionate restriction on the freedom of expression guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights;

- requesting they be reopened immediately and unconditionally;

- requesting the Togolese authorities to stop the intimidation of and the repeated threats against journalists and permit them to continue their work without fear of threats or intimidation.

Write to:

Pitang Tchalla

Ministre de la Communication et de la Formation civique (Minister of Communication and Civic Education)

Ministère de la Communication et de la Formation civique (Ministry of Communication and Civic Education)

BP 40, Lomé, Togo

Fax : +228 221 43 80

Email: info@republicoftogo.com (please specify: for the attention of the Minister of Communication)

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

Combévi Georges Agbodjan

Président de la Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (HAAC) (President of the High Audiovisual and Communication Authority)

BP 48 69,

Lomé, Togo

Salutation: Monsieur le Président

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