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Reporters Without Borders
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Contribution of Reporters Without Borders (a non-governmental organisation in special consultative status) about press freedom in DJIBOUTI

Introduction: Overview of press freedom situation

Djibouti is a small and poor country where there is virtually no private press, because of the numerous obstacles to the free publication of news and the lack of financial resources to build a solid press group. No private radio or television is authorized to operate.

Le Renouveau Djiboutien, a weekly that is the mouthpiece of the opposition Movement for Democratic Renewal and Development (MRD), is the country's sole opposition newspaper and the last publication not under government control. The government has been hounding Le Renouveau for years. After the arrest of four of its employees in 2007 and the seizure of most of its equipment and material, the newspaper had a lot of problems and was unable to publish for several weeks. The only other newspapers still being published in Djibouti are the governmental biweekly La Nation and the Arabic-language Al Qaran, the mouthpiece of the ruling Popular Rally for Progress (RPP), which appears irregularly. The British and US public radio stations, the BBC and Voice of America (VOA), are available on the FM wave band. But Radio France Internationale's FM transmitter was shut down on 14 January 2005 after broadcasting reports about the 1995 murder of French judge Bernard Borrel in Djibouti. The possession of satellite dishes is allowed but is closely monitored by the authorities.

1. Online freedom

Reporters Without Borders has not observed any special problems with the free flow of news online in Djibouti, although it has received unconfirmed reports about the blocking of several opposition website based in Europe.

2. Government steps to improve the situation

No specific steps were taken by the government this year to improve the situation.

3. Working with non-governmental organisations (NGO)

Reporters Without Borders deplors the lack of political will from the government to cooperate on the reform of the press law, for example, or to show more transparency and openness to proposals made by local or international NGOs whenever a journalist is arrested.

4. Recommendations

- The government of Djibouti should scrap the existing press law and adopt a new legislation adapted to democratic standards, eliminating prison terms for press offenses and providing a credible regulation tool for the media.
- The government of Djibouti should open its airwaves to private radio stations and help a free and independent press to appear in the country.
- The armed forces (police and army) should receive training on human rights and press freedom, while mechanisms of sanctions should be put in place in order to tackle the impunity benefiting some elements of law enforcement whenever the attack or wrongfully detain journalists.

The data in this report has been gathered and verified by Reporters Without Borders, which has a network of correspondents in 130 countries and partner organisations in a score of countries.

In some countries, a journalist can be imprisoned for several years just for a word or a photo someone does not like. Reporters Without Borders, founded in 1985, works daily to support press freedom because imprisoning or killing a journalist removes a key witness and threatens the right of all of us to be kept informed of the news.

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