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CAMEROON

The complexity of Cameroon is apparent at all levels. The country continues to suffer through internal upheavals, including major flooding in northern areas in recent years. The government maintains a virtual monopoly on political power in the country. There are never-ending court cases against former officials, including the former ministers Titus Edzoa, Marfa Hamidou Yahya, and Oluanguena Awono. All have been political and legal sagas that have attracted the media's attention.

The media have become slightly more diverse with the advent of new technologies and opportunities. Accepting this trend, Cameroon finds itself largely in the same place as in 2010, with most objectives showing little change.

Professionalism among journalists and economic vitality of the firms where they work remained top concerns. With these weaknesses built into the system, journalists and their employers have become more likely to market their news content to bidders, or engage in blackmail and other perversions of the practice.

Controversy surrounding the publication of a book alleging that leading officials have ties to secret societies like the Freemasons were played out in the public sphere, with writer Charles Atéba Eyéné, a ruling-party member, calling on President Biya to root out such influence in his government. The author was sued by at least one of the accused ministers, which led to the suspension of sales of his book. Further controversy was stoked with reports that Biya would host an anniversary celebration for one of the groups in question.

The events surrounding this incident showed a variety of tendencies in the Cameroonian media—prone to scandal and intrigue reporting, though with low investigative standards, and insufficient attention to the more important issues of the day.

In Cameroon, even in the absence of war or elections, journalists are still under close scrutiny. For instance, a journalist at *Le Messenger* daily newspaper was held in custody by the police, ostensibly while investigating medically assisted reproduction at the general hospital in Yaoundé, on the pretext that she was infringing on the privacy of the first lady.

Despite some progress in establishing independent news outlets, the highest reaches of power remain beyond the reach of journalists in the country.

CAMEROON AT A GLANCE

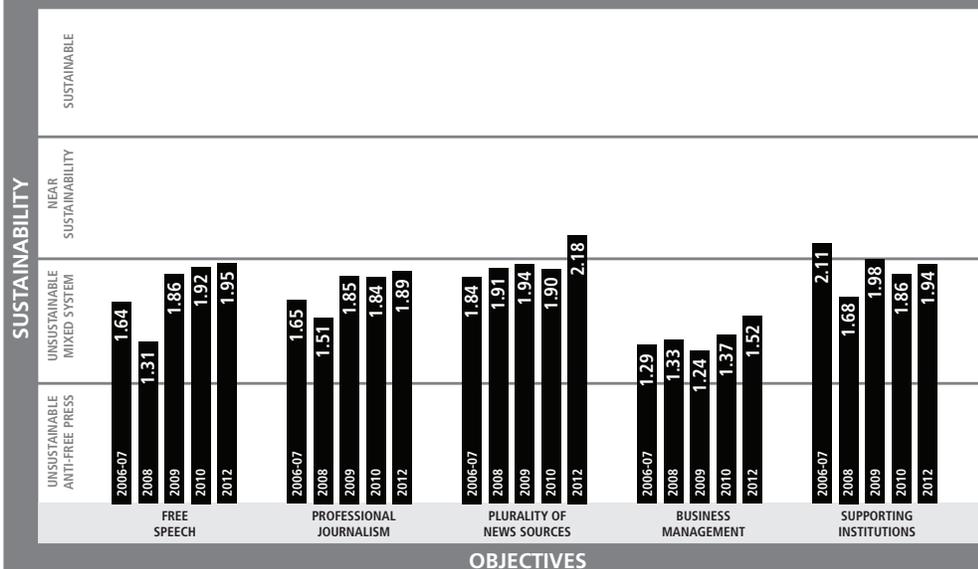
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 20,129,878 (July 2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Yaounde
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Cameroon Highlanders 31%, Equatorial Bantu 19%, Kirdi 11%, Fulani 10%, Northwestern Bantu 8%, Eastern Nigrific 7%, other African 13%, non-African less than 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** indigenous beliefs 40%, Christian 40%, Muslim 20% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** 24 major African language groups, English (official), French (official) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2011-Atlas):** \$24.18 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **GNI per capita (2011-PPP):** \$2,360 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.9% (male 77%, female 59.8%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Paul Biya (since November 6, 1982)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 5 daily newspapers; Radio Stations: 3 main stations; Television Stations: 3
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *Le Messenger* (private), *Cameroon Tribune* (state-owned), *Mutations* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Cameroon Radio Television (state-owned), Radio Reine (Catholic) station, Radio Siantou (private)
- > **News agencies:** None
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 749,600 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: CAMEROON



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.95

Freedom-of-speech rights and practices in Cameroon remain stronger than some other countries in the region, notably southern neighbor Equatorial Guinea. However, editorial independence of the state media is far from guaranteed. While crimes and prosecutions are rarer than in some countries in the region, the threat of these consequences casts a chilling effect across the entire sector. Cameroon's score on this objective is little changed from 2010.

The constitution guarantees freedom of the press. There is also a law on social communication, passed in 1990, that brought organizational structure to the media sector. This being the case, theoretically there are no restrictions on freedom of expression. Rather, the problem lies with the application of the laws, such as the one on social communication, which has led to recurrent arrests, threats, and demands for journalists to reveal their sources. For journalist Fognon Fotso François, *Génération Libre's* manager in Yaoundé, "This law, 22 years on, no longer fits with legal criteria and norms. Therefore, it is neither able to protect nor encourage the freedom of speech and access to information. In the application of this law, there is still much to be done, because it is the journalist who has to produce evidence to the court."

Media licensing and registration standards do exist in the country. For print media, applicants must follow a registration

protocol, while an operating license must be obtained for broadcast media. Nevertheless, the length of the procedure is prohibitively long, and discrimination is cited in the granting of legal documents.

Added to this is a high licensing fee and tax burden for media firms. For example, broadcast outlets must pay a XAF 100 million (\$200,000) annual license fee, which constitutes a substantial obstruction to the freedom of the press in Cameroon. It should be noted, however, that the media do benefit, in a small degree, from particular tax breaks, notably customs-duty breaks for material such as newsprint. But some panelists see as a potential cudgel to use against the press. Journalist Nwe Charles René, of *La Nouvelle* newspaper, noted, "The authorities have, on certain occasions, hinted at the possibility of a tax audit to silence the media."

Defamation, which is a common occurrence in the Cameroonian press, is covered by the Penal Code. The burden of proof is on the plaintiff. However, the law is used to justify the arrest of journalists, even if such arrests often spark the ire of public opinion.

Despite public opposition, the government and its allies maintain significant sway over the state media sector. For private-radio journalist Anaba Epse Batongue Line Renée, "Editorial independence of the state media is practically non-existent, because the appointment of managers, as well as members of the Board of Directors, is political. The financing given by the state [including license fees] typically makes the media serve its interests. In short, state media are favored over private media [by the government]."

There are no restrictions on access to local or international news sources in Cameroon. However, access to public information sources remains an issue, as there is no law that specifically addresses this. François illustrates the difficulty of access to public information: "Access to the presidential palace is restricted to state media and its journalists."

The panel recognized that entry to the field of journalism is free and not restricted. The law does define the criteria for qualified journalists; however, the panel did not cite any restrictions this has over entry to the field. In the field of professional journalism, there are journalists who have trained at the Graduate School of Science and Technology for Information and Communications in Yaoundé alongside self-taught individuals with a passion for the dissemination of information. René pointed out that the new generation of journalists work outside traditional workplaces. "There is freedom to enter the profession, to the point that a new class of journalists has developed, who work out of hotels and administrative halls and corridors, rather than in the newsroom."

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.89

Professionalism in the media remained weak, though the score for this objective is largely unchanged from 2010. Some progress could be seen in the coverage of events, which included sensitive national-security topics that would have been taboo during the border crises of previous years.

Professional media outlets in Cameroon are working to professionalize journalists by way of capacity-building training through a variety of methods, including with donor partner organizations. Standards of ethics and conduct are taught to enable journalists to be capable of providing objective, balanced information that is free from abuse, bias, and groundless accusations.

René was positive about the reporting potential of journalists but noted their failings by putting their limits in context. "Reporters control and check all the news that they present, being careful on each occasion to consult numerous sources. However, the reporter is not above manipulation, because those providing information sometimes take pleasure in providing only information that they find to their liking," he said.

René also offered a mixed assessment of self-enforcement. "Despite the existence of professional organizations and other journalistic associations, professional disciplinary bodies have difficulty getting off the ground."

A Code of Conduct has already been drawn up by the Union of Journalists of Cameroon (UJC) and the Ministry of Communications to support the profession with a view to substantial self-regulation. Nonetheless, the economic poverty of the profession puts the independence of journalists to

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

the test, making them vulnerable to bribery and putting the profession into disrepute. Journalist Deutchoua François Xavier Luc, from the daily newspaper *Le Jour*, added, "Ethical rules have been scorned on a daily basis, in particular in the private media, where the fabrication of articles is very widespread and there is continuous blackmail." Other panelists agreed with this generalization.

Compounding the professionalism problem is the fact that politicians often own media outlets and arrange their editorials not to inform and educate the population, but to sell their political image. Owners are more likely to influence editorial positions and reporters than the editors themselves, and owners often dictate their own standards of practice.

Censorship and self-censorship are also evident in the Cameroonian media, where journalists suppress news and submit to self-imposed restrictions, for fear of being brought before the courts or physically attacked. However, the panel also noted that the press covers a broad range of events, including national and international issues, and sensitive issues such as national security. Their exact treatment of these topics may be influenced by self-censorship, however.

Salaries are virtually non-existent in most private-sector media outlets because employment contracts are often not executed in accordance with the law. The absence of material and financial compensation largely supplants the independence of journalists to their sources, who are often political and social elites with their own agendas. René lamented, "Journalists' salaries remain derisory where they exist, even in the private sector. This has left journalists at the mercy of corruption and manipulation."

Laurent Abah summed up the issues of professionalism in Cameroon, stating, "We have previously noted this as a serious deficiency. Entrance to the profession is not always accompanied by initial training. This weakness affects the quality in a number of ways, including investigations lacking rigor, unverified reporting, weak subject knowledge, blackmailing of sources, and poor presentation. These deficiencies have resulted in the emergence of a very enterprising press, which deals with the major issues but struggles to provide quality."

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Cameroon Objective Score: 2.18

The panel acknowledged a variety of news sources in Cameroon, scoring a notable improvement in this area based on the proliferation of new media sources, and somewhat increased in-house private media production. Part of this progress comes as the single local news agency has folded, and as problems with coverage of rural areas persist.

Technological advances have supplemented traditional formats, such as newspaper, radio, and television, with online media and social network sources for information. Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, Badoo, Twoo, and other sites have become important platforms for information sharing in Cameroon.

It is important, however, to emphasize that the poor distribution of electricity and the weak purchasing power of the population goes a long way toward explaining the lack of access to news sources for a significant part of the population. The “confiscation,” as the panel describes it, of the public media by the government and the parties in power has been a major factor in pushing citizens toward alternative news sources.

Citizens often turn to foreign media for their information, while local media devote themselves to the petty intrigues of local elites who sponsor many outlets. As mentioned above, local papers often seem fully preoccupied with selling the image, ideas, and projects of their elite sponsors.

CAMNEWS, the long-struggling national press agency, was forced to close down for financial reasons. To fill their pages, newspapers turn to foreign agencies, such as Agence France-Presse, Reuters, and others. Without press agencies, quite a number of newspapers rely on other, less qualified providers for their reporting, which hinders quality. Reporting cannot become truly diverse when multiple outlets are reporting on the same event using the same freelance reporter, or the same international press report. With this ad hoc approach, investigative journalism is essentially absent in Cameroon. As Deutchoua explained, “Without a news agency, most media are built on their reporters’ collective works,” which may not be sufficient to cover the full spectrum of issues facing the country.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

Given the rush of political and social actors in the Cameroonian media, UNESCO and a number of other international organizations are encouraging the emergence of proximity journalism by creating community radio stations and specialized newspapers to breach the digital divide between towns and villages. To that end, Laurent Abah noted, “Cameroonians in the cities, in general, have been close to newspapers locally and to foreign media available in Cameroon.”

However, he continued, the urban-rural divide is significant, as in other countries. “The situation could not be more different in the small towns and in the backcountry, where news arrives after a long delay or not at all.”

The division between French- and English-language speakers in society is formative in the media sector as well. Also, a plethora of pre-colonial languages are unrepresented in the media, according to Abah. “The two languages of the country [French and English] have not been equally represented in media content. Very few publications have been in the national languages. The great ethno-linguistic diversity of the country perhaps explains this great divide.”

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.52

Management at Cameroonian media firms remained poor, though the panel assessed a slightly improved score, compared with 2010. The panel was of the opinion that the Cameroonian media suffer greatly from a general lack of material resources and financial means. Direct and indirect aid destined for the press, although trivial and recognized by law, benefits only the state-controlled media.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

Indeed, advertising makes up 70 percent of the revenues of press firms, but poor management, which characterizes private media, also provides ample explanation of the insecurity in which Cameroonian journalists work. Deutchoua explains, "Very few media companies are structured as organized enterprises. Banks do not finance the firms, which therefore leaves them in a precarious financial condition, often becoming a weight on the shoulders of a single individual."

The panel drew a clear cause-and-effect relationship between the poor salaries of journalists and widespread corruption in the field. The panel accused those in charge of running the operations of media firms with lacking the kind of productive management cultures that would generate more revenue, and charged that some managers skim their firms' revenues to the detriment of its ability to operate.

This, in turn, forces journalists to obtain their pay from their sources. Abah provided an explanation. "Typically, the national media have not been, on the whole, populated with economically viable enterprises. When the structures have existed, they have had difficulties covering their costs in practice. There has been an enormous circulation of hidden funding in the press, but that has not benefited their companies."

Advertising agencies, cellular communications, and breweries are the most reliable advertisement buyers. They operate in an anarchical market that does not favor the press firms. Given that the advertising market is not yet subject to rigorous regulations, advertisers negotiate the markets and impose the terms of engagement. Media firms, as a result of this informal and unregulated system, receive little income for ad buys and receive little revenue with which to remain afloat.

Poverty also lies at the root of low listener numbers and weak circulation figures noted in the Cameroonian media. The weak purchasing power of the population and the poor distribution of electricity are further elements that prejudice the media, which want to maximize their audience and enlarge their readership.

One panelist, a journalist at CNTV who asked not to be identified, provided a good summary of the revenue scene, saying, "In ascending order, Cameroonian journalists make their income from advertising, sales, and patrons. The absence of even one of these elements disrupts the operations and finances of the firm."

The panelist further noted that citizens often pick up and read newspapers at the newsstand, forgoing purchase due to the cost. "They have been content to read the titles at the newsstand and to leave it at that," the panelist said.

The advertising market for television broadcasters is more developed. However, according to the panelist from CNTV, "Expenditures are generally greater than profits, and to balance the books, some press proprietors have resorted to informal methods to make ends meet."

Nestor Nga Etofa added, "Management of a media firm in Cameroon is little more than a delusion. In a very unfavorable economic environment, many press barons, former journalists for the most part, have no training in the management of a media firm. Consequently, even media firms which have been newly created disappear because of a lack of capital and a lack of financial and technical resources, due to a lack of management. There has been an acute and urgent need for a training program for the heads of media firms in Cameroon."

Thus, the problem is not only a general economic malaise, but management competences at media firms. The panel agreed that firms would be more sustainable, and their reporters more professional, if competent management prevailed at their organizations.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.94

Cameroon's supporting institutions received largely similar scores to the 2010 assessment. An improper focus of NGO training programs, as perceived by the panel, lowered the country's score in that indicator. However, the group was more positive on the performance of the main journalists' association.

The panel was unanimous that the effect of attempts to establish professional associations and other supporting

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

institutions for the media sector are frequently inconclusive. Trade-union structures exist, but without evident visibility. This is especially true for the UJC, whose feverish activity is currently hampered by the lack of revenues available for its work. One participant, who wished to remain anonymous, explained, "Professional associations have guaranteed journalists' rights. Only few journalists have been affiliated with them, though, for various reasons. Such professional organizations have functioned only sporadically; however, members have often fallen behind with their dues, or the organization has suffered from in-fighting."

Etofa lamented, "Professional camaraderie has not yet truly taken hold among journalists. While it is true that there has been an abundance of organizations in existence in the media sector, these structures seem to first satisfy the personal interests of their promoters. The consequence has been that associations have been swallowed up and made to serve the interests of individuals and their networks," but not the entire journalism field.

Etofa argued that Cameroonian journalists have no sense of the need for a common advocacy of their rights and interests. They are poorly equipped and are chasing scarce resources; thus, they are unable to come together to discuss and analyze the problems that plague the sector and to propose possible solutions. "Examples [of solutions] include forming a strong and dynamic journalists' union, a communications center, and ongoing professional forums" for professional development, Etofa concluded.

When it comes to defending the freedom of the press, there is no local organization that deals directly with the matter. Reporters Without Borders has a presence in Cameroon, and its activity is evident. As Abah noted, "In general terms, many forms of support have existed for the press. The state, institutions, and NGOs have supported the media. What has been less beneficial is that these resources, insufficient from the outset, have clearly not been used to improve the quality of media firms, or to improve the professional quality of journalists."

The Graduate School of the Science and Technology of Information and Communications in Yaoundé cannot escape the consequences of the degradation of general basic education in Cameroon. Journalists trained at this institution, like those elsewhere, are not provided with the knowledge needed to help them become accomplished in the field.

Western donors, embassies, and other backers have initiated projects, which include sponsorship for training and capacity building for Cameroonian journalists. As journalist Patricia Ngo Nouehem explains, "There have been training opportunities, but what they provide hasn't always been accessible to all journalists."

Nouehem pointed out that the weakness of the donor-funded programs, in her opinion, is their focus on narrow subject matter, rather than basic skills. "Most of the time, these trainings are on a particular key issue, such as climate change, sustainable development, and children's rights. Very few training opportunities have tackled the professional problems faced by journalists, or prepared them to adapt their work to the use of modern technology."

Although customs exemptions help reduce the cost of raw materials, the high cost of printing is still felt throughout the sector and is passed along to consumers in often unaffordable sales prices for print editions.

The panel blamed the lack of competition in the parcel delivery industry for the publishers' inability to efficiently deliver publications to the remote regions of the country. This limits their circulation and sales potential.

List of Panel Participants

Francois Xavier Luc Deurchoua, chair of editorial board, *Le Jour*, Yaoundé

Flore Behalal, journalist, Ministry of Communications, Yaoundé

Francois Oba'a Bikoro, editor-in-chief, Vision4 TV, Yaoundé

Edith Abilogo, journalist, Journalists for Earth, Yaoundé

Charles Rene Nwe, journalist, *La Nouvelle Republique*, Yaoundé

Nestor Nga Etoga, director of publication, *Management and Outlook*, Yaoundé

Francois Fogno Fotso, director of publication, *Free Generation*, Yaoundé

Line Renee Anaba epse Batongue, journalist, Radio Nlongkak, Yaoundé

Laurent Abah, deputy editor, *Cameroon Tribune*, Yaoundé

Patricia Ngo Nguem, journalist, *Mutations*, Yaoundé

Moderator and Author

Samuel Obiang Mbana Mangue, journalist and correspondent, AFP and Africa No. 1 Radio; *Journaliste en Danger*, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

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