

# NIGER/GUINEA



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INQUIRY REPORT

## «TURNING THE PAGE» HOPES FOR MEDIA FREEDOM IN NIGER AND GUINEA

**REPORTERS  
WITHOUT BORDERS**  
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

# NOSTALGIE 98.2 FM

La Légende

## Guinée

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With research coordinator Gilles Lordet in Guinea and Jean-Louis Saporito, a journalist and Reporters Without Borders board member, in Niger.

In Guinea, the National Transition Council (CNT) led by Gen. Sékouba Konaté held the first free and transparent election in the country's history in 2010. It was won by long-time opposition leader, Alpha Condé. In Niger, a military coup on 18 February 2010 ended President Mamadou Tandja's attempts to stay in office beyond the end of his term and opened the way for a transition under the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSRD). It resulted in Mahamadou Issoufou's election in early 2011.

Reporters Without Borders, which visited Guinea from 22 to 27 May and Niger from 26 to 30 June, found that the democratic transition in both countries was accompanied by a marked increase in media freedom and strong hopes of an improvement in the situation of the media and journalists. It was these hopes that Reporters Without Borders wanted to evaluate.

In Conakry, the Reporters Without Borders delegation was received by officials from the ministry of communication and ministry of territorial administration and decentralization, by justice minister Christian Sow and by government secretary-general Fodé Kissi Camara.

The delegation also met the college of the National Communication Council (CNC), supreme court president Mamadou Sylla, National Transition Council president Hadja Rabiataou Sera Diallo, a representative of the opposition Union of Guinea Democratic Forces (UFDG), as well as leading media figures and several journalists' associations including the Guinean Association of Independent Press Editors (AGEPI), the Union of Guinean Free Radio and TV Stations (URTELGUI) and the Guinean Association of Online Media (AGUIPEL).

In Niamey, Reporters Without Borders met Prime Minister Brigi Rafini, communication minister Salifou Labo Bouché,

justice minister Marou Amadou, Gen. Salou Djibo, who headed the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSRD) and was president during the transition, and several Niamey-based foreign diplomats.

The Reporters Without Borders delegation also met with representatives of the opposition National Movement for a Development Society (MNSD), the National Communication Monitoring Centre (ONC), which is a regulatory body, the Niger Independent Monitoring Centre for Media Ethics and Conduct (ONIMED), which is self-regulatory, and the Press Club (Maison de la Presse). They also visited the Institute for Training in Information and Communication Techniques (IF-TIC) and most of the Niamey-based media.



A NEWSSTAND IN NIAMEY COPYRIGHT: RSF

## FREE AND DIVERSE MEDIA LANDSCAPES

**G**uinea currently has more than 30 newspapers, a similar number of privately-owned radio stations, two privately-owned TV stations and more than 50 websites. These media are not just concentrated in the capital Conakry. They are also based in the interior.

Radio, which has benefited from a recent reduction in restrictions on licences, is the most popular form of media in Guinea, as it is in many African countries. Phone-in programmes such as *Espace FM's* "Les Grandes Gueules" (Big Mouths), *Nostalgie's* "Zone Libre" (Free Zone), *Soleil FM's* "La Grogne" (Discontent), *Familia's* "Société Débat" (Debating Society) and *Sabari FM's* "Défoulez-vous" (Let off Steam) have a lot of listeners.

In Niger, where restrictions were loosened two decades ago, the media are very diverse. The country has around 50 weekly and monthly publications that circulate above all in urban areas, around 30 radio stations, seven TV stations (two state-owned, five privately-owned) and around 120 community radio stations. Online media, on the other hand, are still virtually non-existent.

The media are fairly outspoken in both countries. In Niger, as much space is given to expressing opinions as reporting the facts. The print media, especially satirical publications such as the influential *Lynx* in Guinea and *La Griffie* in Niger contain a great deal of criticism and even caricature.

But the economic environment continues to be tough for the media. In Niger, only one newspaper, the state-owned daily *Le Sahel*, has the resources to publish on a daily basis. Virtually no journalist has a work contract and there is no minimum salary.

Finally, the Guinean media are riven by ethnic divisions. Hasane Kaba, the president of the Guinean Association of Independent Press Editors (AGEPI), said: "Here, you start reading an article at the bottom. You look at the signature. Who wrote it? What ethnic group does he belong to?" This has no equivalent in Niger.

## MEDIA FREEDOM DURING TRANSITION PERIODS

Gen. Sékouba Konaté's accession to the presidency in Guinea in December 2009 and the military coup in Niger on 18 February 2010 ended periods of dictatorship and political anarchy. The transitions led by the National Transition Council (CNT) in Guinea and the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSR) in Niger were favourable for media freedom.

## NEW LAWS DECRIMINALIZING MEDIA OFFENCES

In both countries, legislation was overhauled, giving rise to new laws protecting media freedom, redefining the powers of media regulatory bodies and how their members are appointed, and guaranteeing access to government-held information. The new laws also reflected the principle of the decriminalization of media offences.

In a forward to a collection of media and communication laws in Niger that was published by the National Communication Monitoring Centre, Abdourahamane Ousmane, the centre’s current president and former head of the Niger Press Club, described the CSRD-led transition as “revolutionary” and stressed the importance of the legal and institutional reforms that it had carried out.

“The first pillar of this [legal and institutional] edifice was without doubt the National Conference on the Media held in March 2010, before most of the transition institutions had been created,” Ousmane wrote. “The participants in the National Conference on the Media approved a draft text that later served as the basis for Order No. 2010-035 on media freedom that was

adopted on 4 June 2010. This took Niger directly into the era of decriminalization of media offences.”

This order scrapped prison sentences for journalists in cases of defamation or publication of wrong information, replacing them with fairer and more appropriate penalties, and introduced the principle of self-regulation.

Meanwhile, Order No. 2010-18 of 15 April 2010 on the composition, powers and functioning of the National Communication Monitoring Centre (ONC) created this new entity as a regulatory body to replace the High Council for Communication (CSC).

And finally, Order No. 2011-22 of 23 February 2011 on the Charter of Access to Public Information and Administrative Documents completed the legislative arsenal adopted during the transition. The aim of this law was to improve transparency and the public’s access to information held by the state. It should help to change attitudes of both state officials who want to keep everything secret, and journalists who tend to wait for information to land in their lap.

In both countries, the transitions began at a dark time for media freedom.

In Guinea, President Lansana Conté’s death on 22 December 2008 allowed an army captain, Moussa Dadis Camara, to seize power in a coup and hold on to it for 12 months. No one has forgotten how soldiers opened fire to disperse a demonstration by opposition activists in a Conakry soccer stadium on 28 September 2009, leaving hundreds dead and thousands wounded.

Journalists who witnessed the bloodshed were arrested, beaten and in some case threatened with death. Soldiers loyal to Capt. Dadis went after journalists who were regarded as “traitors” and accused of “selling out Guinea” for reporting what had happened. A number of journalists, both those who were the correspondents of foreign media and those working for local media, especially online media, had to flee the country.

In Niger, the latter stages of President Mamadou Tandja’s rule were also marked by many media freedom violations. Several journalists had to endure spells in prison and some media, such as the Niamey-based media group *Dounia* and Agadez-based radio *Sahara FM*, were harassed and in some cases suspended



THE 28 SEPTEMBER STADIUM IN CONAKRY COPYRIGHT: RSF

by the High Council for Communication (CSC), the regulatory body then run by the Tandja loyalist Daouda Diallo.





GEN. SANGARÉ, THE HEAD OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION, ANNOUNCING THE SECOND ROUND RESULTS AT THE CONAKRY PRESS CLUB COPYRIGHT: AFP/ISSOUF SANOGO

Monitoring Centre (ONC), which played a key role in ensuring that the election campaign was conducted in an orderly manner in the media.

ONC resolutions 002/2011 and 003/2011 of 12 January 2011 established how the free messages of candidates and political parties should be produced, programmed and disseminated. Particular attention was paid to the training of journalists covering the elections. Conferences and training modules on journalists’ duties were organized between the first and second round campaigns in parallel with those offered by the Press Club.

The ONC always operated in the most transparent and participatory manner. It was always ready to dialogue with the political parties about the various electoral propaganda formats that were proposed. The order in which electoral messages were carried by the state-owned media was determined by a lottery held in the presence of representatives of the candidates and parties participating in the election.

## INCIDENTS

In Guinea, a climate of fear created by post-election violence paralyzed many news media for several days until the proclamation of a state of emergency restored calm.

Several dozen supporters of losing presidential candidate Cellou Dallein Diallo and his party, the UFDG, gathered outside the headquarters of the *Sabari FM - Le Diplomate* group in the Conakry district of Cosa at around 9 a.m. on 15 November 2010, one week after the election, and threatened to ransack it, accusing its management and journalists of supporting the election’s declared winner, Alpha Condé.

At the same time, they clashed with members of the special election security units in the district, where most of the inhabitants are members of the Fula ethnic group and Diallo supporters. They finally called off their plan to ransack the media group’s headquarters after mediation by the building’s owner. Most journalists in Conakry meanwhile stayed indoors for fear of being targeted by political activists or the security forces

The only incident during Niger’s transition was the arrest of Moussa Aksar, the editor of the biweekly *L’Événement*, on the morning of 20 September 2010. He was questioned by







ning to radio *Espace FM* in early April for “repeated violations of ethics and professional conduct in its programme *Les Grandes Gueules*.” The following week it issued a warning to *Soleil FM* and then, on 21 July, two days after an attack on President Condé’s private residence with heavy weapons, it issued “an appeal to the media, both state and privately-owned, to abstain from any comment that could add oil to the flames during this very sensitive period in our history.”

On 3 April, the security forces prevented several media from covering unsuccessful presidential candidate Cellou Dallo’s arrival in Conakry. Journalists with *Gangan FM* and *Gangan TV* were especially targeted. “You people from *Gangan*, we are going to deal with you,” a policeman told them.

At around 2 p.m. on 30 May, a dozen red berets – some in civilian dress, some in uniforms and brandishing guns – raided the premises of the *L’Indépendant - Le Démocrate* group, which is owned by Aboubacar Sylla, who was communication minister during the transition. They said they were looking for the editor, Mamadou Dian Baldé. “We have questions to ask him and accounts to settle,” one said, referring to a story published four days earlier that was headlined “Pay increases, soldiers are rubbing their hands.” In the editor’s absence, they threatened to seize everyone and take them “to the camp.” They eventually changed their minds and left.

The incident shows that the old repressive reflexes have not completely disappeared, not in the military at least, and that the safety of media personnel is not fully assured, despite CNC president Martine Condé’s insistence, during a meeting with Reporters Without Borders, that: “We have succeeded in calming the security forces down. They will not raid news media anymore.”

The CNC suspended the privately-owned weekly *Le Défi* for two months on 11 June for “violating ethics and professional conduct” in an editorial headlined “National Unity: Facinet Touré’s madness” in which the newspaper’s editor, Bah Thierno Mamadou, demanded Gen. Facinet Touré’s dismissal from the post of national mediator for accusing the Fula in May of having an economic monopoly and saying they should be subjected to political discrimination.

This suspension violated *Le Défi*’s right to comment on statements by a senior government official.

The media’s problems are not concentrated only in Conakry. In N’Zérékoré, in Forested Guinea, two *Radio Liberté FM* journa-



THE 25 AUGUST PALACE IN CONAKRY, HEADQUARTERS OF THE NATIONAL COMMUNICATION COUNCIL  
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lists, Théodore Loua and Daniel Lama, were held for 24 hours in mid-January on the orders of the city’s prosecutor, Gnokoro Camara. Former *Radio Liberté FM* reporter Emmanuel Toumany Camara was briefly detained on 13 June by the city’s governor, Mohamed Ismaël Traoré.

In Niger, there have been no significant incidents. In the past year, a dozen complaints have nonetheless been submitted to ONIMED by individuals who believe they have been defamed. The attitude of some newspapers such as *Le Courrier* and *Le Visionnaire* disturb certain journalists, who think they are violating professional conduct by attacking well-known figures without being able to produce evidence of their accusations. As a result, the executive bureau of the Niger Association of Independent Press Publishers (ANEPI) provisionally suspended the membership of *Le Visionnaire*’s publisher on 16 July.

## REGULATING AND STRENGTHENING THE MEDIA

In Niger, two entities are responsible for media regulation: the National Communication Monitoring Centre (ONC), which is a regulatory body, and the Niger Independent Monitoring Centre for Media Ethics and Conduct (ONIMED), which is self-regulatory.







## IN THE LIGHT OF THE CURRENT MEDIA FREEDOM SITUATION IN NIGER AND GUINEA, REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS RECOMMENDS...

### IN GUINEA

President Alpha Condé should publicly undertake to guarantee media freedom and respect for media diversity.

Government secretary-general Fodé Kissi Camara should without delay submit the three 2010 laws to the supreme court so that it can verify their compliance with the constitution and thereby allow their publication in the official gazette.

The government should ensure that *Radio Télévision Guinéenne (RTG)* continues to be a public service media that is accessible to all political parties and reflects all aspects of Guinean society. And should launch a debate about the status of journalists in Guinea.

The ministry of territorial administration and decentralization should defend the physical safety of journalists – both those from the state and privately-owned media – and should ensure that the security forces are aware of the need to respect journalists, especially when they are covering elections.

Journalists’ associations should collectively demand an improvement in their work conditions and status, and should defend their interests with more energy.

Bilateral and multilateral partners should continue the efforts to assist the Guinean media that began during the 2010 elections.

### IN NIGER

The most senior state officials should continue their efforts to promote media freedom and should confirm their commitment to doing this.

President Mahamadou Issoufou should again sign the “Declaration of Table Mountain,” this time as elected president.

The government should envisage measures likely to improve the economic environment for the media (such as an increase in media assistance funds and more state advertising for the privately-owned media); and should establish major courses in journalism and communication by, for example, reinforcing the IFTIC and creating a specific course at the University of Niamey.

The regulatory and self-regulatory bodies (ONC and ONIMED) should continue their role of promoting media freedom and improving the media sector.

Journalists should act in a more responsible manner by never forgetting their duties as news reporters.

The international community should provide structural support for institutions such as the Press Club (Maison de la Presse



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