



2006 Annual Report

AFRICA

In Africa, impunity is not a matter of bad luck, it is the general rule. In Burkina Faso, those who murdered journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998 spend their days in tranquility. The investigation has been stalled by the law of silence that surrounds the presidential guard and François Compaoré, the brother of the president, who has been implicated in this case. In Gambia, the killers of Deyda Hydara, gunned down in 2004, have every reason to enjoy peace of mind. They run absolutely no risk of arrest. President Yahya Jammeh is too busy sullyng the memory of the victim, as well as humiliating and threatening journalists. Nothing has been heard of Guy-André Kieffer, kidnapped in Cote d'Ivoire in April 2004, since he fell into a trap set by Michel Legré, the brother-in-law of the wife of President Laurent Gbagbo. Released after 18 months in custody, Michel Legré has pointed the finger at the head of state's entourage. But the French magistrates appointed to the case have failed to complete their investigation, in a politically poisonous climate. Even in Mozambique, where the murderers of Carlos Cardoso, who was ambushed in 2000, received heavy sentences, the wounds caused by this tragedy have still not fully healed. It is still not known whether the son of the former president Joachim Chissano, Nyimpine, has any link with the case. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Acquitté Kisembo, who worked for *Agence France-Presse*, is still posted as "missing". But he was almost certainly murdered by one of the militias that operate in the east of the country.

Impunity is also political. Countries systematically crack down on the press without being called to account by anyone. For more than five years, a closed and gagged Eritrea has been an open air prison. The least hint of opposition is punished by imprisonment. Thirteen journalists were sent to languish in jail, in a climate of general indifference, one week after 11 September 2001. But the threat of a new war with Ethiopia has allowed President Issaias Afewerki to escape any sanctions. As for the president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, a nationalist autocrat who brooks no discordant voices, benefits from the benevolent protection of Thabo Mbeki, president of a South Africa that has become the continent's superpower. Rather than support democratic movements, the country of Nelson Mandela prefers to play the role of guardian to a despot in the name of African sovereignty. The Democratic Republic of Congo has experienced a wave of murders of journalists which have not caught the attention of the UN or the European Union, both busy organising elections. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, in Ethiopia, for his part, viewed demonstrations in November as an attempted armed insurrection organised by the opposition and its press. In an immediate reaction, opposition leaders and editors of some newspapers were arrested and faced with charges of extreme gravity, not to say absurdity, notwithstanding the fact that Addis Ababa is the headquarters of the African Union. In Rwanda, the government and party of Paul Kagame use and abuse draconian laws and the fear of "sedition" to hound any journalists who are too independent for their taste. The people's *gacaca* courts set up to try some of those charged with genocide, are sometimes used for score-settling. No country dares challenge the government directly, relations with the international community are still marked by the horrifying memory of the 1994 genocide. As for the "hate media" of Cote d'Ivoire, they continue to bellow their message freely in a country that has been paralysed and corrupted by civil war. Moderate journalists have to rub along with intolerable colleagues. In Teodoro Obiang Nguema's Equatorial Guinea no excuses need to be given for the desert for freedoms that the government runs. No-one talks about freedom of the press to the head of "Africa's Kuwait". In the small kingdom of Swaziland of the absolute monarch Mswati III, freedom of press is a fantasy. Publishing the truth is a crime and that does not appear to bother anyone.

Even if Nigeria has left behind the dark years of the military juntas, journalists can only suffer in silence the state security's beatings and heavy-handed searches. Nothing is done to oblige the police to respect press freedom, for which the government displays a sovereign indifference. To a lesser extent, police officers in Gabon and Guinea can continue to beat journalists doing their job; since these are the orders they are given. On the other side of the continent, the new government in Somalia is trying to rebuild a nation on the basis of an archipelago of domains defended by armies of the unemployed. But the clan chiefs have no hesitation in attacking journalists who inform the people despite the anarchy. At the best they are banished. At the worst they have them killed.

DAILY INJUSTICE

African journalists are also confronted with that other form of impunity that is injustice, whereby the guilty can be rewarded and the innocent punished. In countries such Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Cameroon, Madagascar, Uganda, Malawi, Seychelles, Zambia, Lesotho, Niger, Chad and Sierra Leone, defamation or publishing false news are considered to be crimes. On the basis of one

complaint and if the person lodging it should be influential or have influential allies, the police take a cunning pleasure in arresting journalists as if they were robbers. No matter that the subsequent trials prove them innocent. They will have been in prison for 24 hours or for several weeks. Where corruption is the general rule, the best way to avoid being thrown into a prison cell is to applaud ministers, officials and businessmen.

Reporters Without Borders has not let up in its pleas to governments to put an end to these practices and change their laws. Togo, Angola, and the Central African Republic have done so and are better for it. The press, which regulates itself through representative bodies, has acquired responsibility and relations with government are no longer marked with rancour and the spirit of revenge. The problems that continue to beset the press are more likely to be linked to a heritage of violence and political hatreds that sometimes make journalists the targets of those who are unaccustomed to the rules of democracy. The governments of Senegal, Madagascar and Niger, have frequently made convincing sounding promises to decriminalise press offences - but only later, when they no longer feel the need to send the police to punish journalists who have crossed the "red lines".

FREEDOM IN A FEW PLACES

Some governments prefer to allow the status quo to continue on the convenient pretext that they have to deal with situations in which violence can easily be stoked up. They fail to understand that it is injustice that creates the danger. Others, like Benin, Mali, Burkina Faso, Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania, Burundi, Ghana, Liberia, the Comoros and Congo-Brazzaville, ensure a satisfactory degree of press freedom despite episodes of violence and harassment. In cases brought before the courts, the law is applied with care and relative fairness. As a result, press offences do not give rise to the international reactions provoked by the imprisonment of a journalist, who whether admirable or mediocre, automatically becomes a martyr. Prison sentences for press offences are disproportionate and counter-productive.

African governments seem to have understood. The 3 August palace revolution in Mauritania brought to power a team who set their goal as creating a democracy to replace the "private domain" of ousted president Maaouiya Ould Taya. It is a mammoth task that includes justice and law reform, in which Reporters Without Borders is actively taking part, alongside journalists in a country that was one of the most repressive on the continent. The situation in Chad has opened up after a dark year for the press. Following an on-the-spot investigation, while four journalists were in prison, Reporters Without Borders suggested an amendment to the law and negotiations between the journalists' union and the government have begun, in a political context that is nevertheless extremely dangerous. In Sudan, where guns still do the talking, the formation of a government of national unity has allowed President Omar al-Bashir to take a historic step – abolishing emergency laws and lifting censorship. Pressure produces results.

But these areas of progress are rare and fragile. Solidarity with Africa is not just a question of food and money. Solidarity should also mean insistence on the rule of law. To close one's eyes to trampled freedoms, to get used to violence, become inured to political murders, is to approve them and accept that there are people deserving of justice and others deserving of oppression. In Gambia, a Reporters Without Borders representative was told by a friend of Deyda Hydara, "If you forget us, they will do what they want with us".

Léonard Vincent
Head of Africa desk

BURKINA FASO

In the “land of men of integrity”, freedom of the press has become a reality over the years. There is a generalised climate of outspokenness. There were few judicial cases for press offences. A robust satirical press comes out regularly without suffering any particular difficulties. But blood was shed before this new climate came about. The 1998 murder of journalist Norbert Zongo, in which there were strong suspicions against the brother of President Blaise Compaoré, was never cleared up. Reporters Without Borders had a further

meeting with the examining magistrate in the case, Wenceslas Ilboudo, in September 2005. He explained that, despite his efforts, the key witnesses in the case were refusing to talk. One of the most important suspects, a former sergeant in the presidential guard, Marcel Kafando, although sick and sentenced for the murder which Norbert Zongo was investigating when he was killed, lives peacefully at his home in Ouagadougou. This state of affairs did not prevent President Blaise Compaoré from being comfortably re-elected, in November.

BURUNDI

At the beginning of summer 2005, the power handover from former president Domitien Ndayizeye and the new, Pierre Nkurunziza, from the ranks of the Hutu rebellion, proved painful for one journalist. After the intelligence services ques-

tioned him as if he were a crook, he spent eight days in prison for having annoyed the head of state. He was only released as a result of international pressure. Despite recurrent tensions, press freedom in the country is genuine if fragile.

CAMEROON

In the country of Paul Biya, re-elected president in 2005, the situation is simple: draconian laws regularly put journalists behind bars. Five journalists, including an Australian reporter and the Reporters Without Borders' correspondent spent time in prison. In this hostile climate, several quality titles cling on to survival in a country that is mired in corruption. But in both Yaoundé and Douala, there is a profusion of privately-owned newspapers, but this is no guarantee of quality or integrity. The

courts, frequently prompted by the powerful or the corrupt acting with complete impunity, strike without distinction at journalists who are courageous, those who are badly trained and some who are simply malicious. Harsh jail sentences are systematically handed down. During the year, Reporters Without Borders tried to persuade the government to de-criminalise press offences to help Cameroonian journalists to become more responsible and professional. This has so far been in vain.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

If proof were needed that de-criminalising press offences were beneficial to democracy, this country provided it. Under pressure from local journalists and international organisations, the Central African Republic, land of coups and guerrilla conflict, did just this at the end of 2004 and is better for it. The presidential election took place against a tense but responsible climate. The media were both protected and under surveillance.

There were none of the abuses that often occur in the region. Judicial procedure was observed in defamation cases and editors of newspapers stopped working when they were threatened with imprisonment.

However political hatreds have a way of lasting and Central African journalists were sometimes targeted by "short-tempered" elements within the army.

CHAD

If the press is pluralist in N'Djamena, it is also very poor and subject to ethnic turmoil that regularly destabilises the neighbouring Darfur region of Sudan. Left more or less in peace by the government despite the existence of draconian legislation, it was put to a rude test in 2005. Local radios in particular were often targeted by the powerful and politically motivated suspensions are not unusual. Controversial constitutional reform, repeated political crises, a powerful political police and exacerbated intercommunity tensions created an explosive cocktail that put four journalists in prison in July 2005. The crisis

between the government of President Idriss Déby and an often critical private press, reached its apogee.

Reporters Without Borders carried out an in the field investigation at the end of September and helped restore dialogue between the two sides. The journalists were released and a new draft law was proposed, but the country is so destabilised by armed groups, desertions and clan struggles that democratic reform proved difficult to put into effect. Tensions are still running high and real press freedom has yet to be won.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The Ivorian press suffers from a number of ills and presents many problems. Journalists working in Abidjan have to deal with numerous and dangerous challenges. They face death threats, are admired or hated by supporters of whichever camp, forced underground or into exile and stunned by political violence that has destabilised the country for more than five years. Some have turned themselves into obedient servants of those who give orders, the political actors who know how to manipulate a fragile press and journalists who are either underpaid or unpaid altogether. A few others are waiting for better days, while others battle to save their profession, in a way that makes the front page of newspapers often look more like a political tract than the first page of a news service. Otherwise, the national sport to be found in Abidjan each morning consists of "street parliaments" which debate the huge eye-catching headlines on the front pages of the dailies.

In the north of the country, which is held by the former rebels of the New Forces (FN), the public media frequency has been pirated by a propaganda radio and television and there is limited newspaper distribution. Laurent Gbagbo's government considers the international press, and in particular *Radio France Internationale (RFI)*, as an enemy voice. It has therefore completely suspended its FM broadcasts, diminishing still further the Ivorian media landscape.

On the eve of the adoption of a new resolution by the UN Security Council in May 2005, Reporters

Without Borders released a mission report entitled, "Time to disarm minds, pens and microphones". As the country headed for presidential elections at the end of October, the organisation proposed a series of measures to remove the challenge of "hate media" which poison a political climate that is already violent enough.

Against this backdrop of outrage, French-Canadian journalist Guy-André Kieffer, who was kidnapped in April 2004, is still missing. A French examining magistrate has travelled to Abidjan four times to interview the chief witnesses and to carry out investigations. He questioned the last man known to have seen Kieffer alive, Michel Legré, brother-in-law of the wife of the head of state, Simone Gbagbo. He was charged with abduction and holding a hostage and spent more than a year in custody in Abidjan, before being released provisionally at the end of 2005. To counter the climate of intimidation in which he was forced to conduct interviews, the French magistrate asked to be allowed to transfer the suspect to France. So far he has been unsuccessful, his request held up at the office of the head of state, whose mandate has been extended by the international community, since it has not been possible to organise elections. The most likely lead, given by Michel Legré, is that involving the entourage of President Gbagbo and in particular his minister of economy and finance, Paul Bohoun Bouabré. Before he was kidnapped, the journalist was investigating embezzlement of money in the cocoa trade, the Cote d'Ivoire's main resource.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The vast spread of the former Zaire reflects the problems that confront journalists in this country. In Kinshasa, where the press is abundant, polemical and unruly, a black year for press freedom has been characterised by death threats, abusive arrests and police brutality. At the end of 2005, one of the capital's most respected journalists, Franck "Ngyke" Kangundu and his wife, Hélène Mpaka, were murdered in horrible circumstances. The outcry within the profession should have forced the authorities to react in a credible manner. Instead the police, despite the evidence, appeared to follow a lead of a common-law crime. After this, the leaders of Reporters Without Borders' partner organisation in the

country, Journalist in danger (JED), which had been outspoken in the case, were targeted for death threats which forced them to abandon their work.

The situation is hardly any better in the provinces. In areas infested with armed groups with vague political aims, journalists are at very serious risk. One, working for *AFP*, Acquitté Kisémbé, went missing in Ituri in 2003 and it appears that he was murdered by militiamen in the area. A well known journalist on *Radio Okapi* narrowly escaped death in Katanga, while in Bukavu on the border with Rwanda there has been an appalling climate of fear since the murder there of Pascal Kabemgulu Kibembi, an investigator for a local human rights NGO.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Monochrome and monotonous, news dish-
ed out to the citizens of Teodoro
Obiang Nguéma's country is thin stuff. The
country has no privately-owned publications,
apart from in exile. The few journalists working

for the international media or agencies are put
under surveillance, warned and threatened. It is
not done to criticise the president, his family or
his clan and the state media takes good care
not to.

ERITREA

Africa's youngest country is still the continent's largest prison for journalists. Thirteen of them, including most of the newspaper's editors from before 2001, are being secretly held, somewhere in the country, without ever going before a court, see a lawyer or speak to their families. The government, which controls the country with an iron fist, claims that they are traitors to the country, Ethiopian spies or deserters. It is not known if they are still alive.

In November, the disturbing episode of the two-day release of the founder of the weekly *Setit*, Dawit Isaac, served as a reminder of the extent to which President Issaias Afeworki is pitiless towards those he considers his opponents. The journalist was released on 19 November and was able to phone his wife and friends who are in exile in Sweden to tell them he would be joining them. But the Eritrean government, for unknown reasons, decided to throw him back in prison two days later, to general bewilderment.

ETHIOPIA

The extremely volatile political situation in this electoral year that saw a spectacular boost for the opposition, struck a heavy blow to the privately-owned press in Addis Ababa. The state media continue to display the same servility towards the government. While some private Amharic-language weeklies tried to provide serious coverage of fast-moving events, others gave themselves over to partisan journalism or propaganda. The occasion was too tempting for Meles Zenawi's government. Arrests, suspensions and threats were handed out at the least trouble.

After the riots in November, a major crackdown in the ranks of the opposition also pulled in around a score of newspaper owners and their editors. Facing "treason" charges along with the leaders of the coalition that contested the results of the 15 May legislative elections, they face the death penalty. Some have managed to flee abroad but others have not. The "moderate" private press still manages to appear, despite major printing and distribution problems and the extreme touchiness of an unstable government, which believes itself confronted by a revolutionary opposition, supported by an unbridled and irresponsible media.

GABON

The government of Omar Bongo Odimba and the powerful state press spend a lot of energy in discrediting not only opposition parties but also the independent press. The presidential election in the autumn was seized on as a chance for a campaign to vilify and systematically discredit

the opposition. Despite this outrageous imbalance, with little money and facing police brutality the few privately-owned publications in Libreville continued to provide news to Gabonese citizens without singing the praises of the doyen of African heads of state.

GAMBIA

For several years, Reporters Without Borders has been trying unsuccessfully to alert international opinion to the state of press freedom in the Gambia of President Yahya Jammeh. Neither the African Union, nor the United States or the UK appear to have taken seriously the agonised appeals from journalists in this small English-speaking country surrounded by Senegal. As a result, the situation worsens year by year.

The year 2005 began with a bereavement. Deyda Hydara, one of the most respected figures in Gambian journalism, correspondent for Reporters Without Borders and *AFP*, was cold-bloodedly murdered on 16 December 2004. Many people, rightly or wrongly, saw the hand of the government in the killing that was carried out by hit men. After two investigations in the field, Reporters Without Borders found that the killing had been part of a series of attacks against journalists and other figures who were seen as "troublemakers". Each time there was the same method of operation, use of cars without license plates and the prior issuing of death threats. The first ever murder of a Reporters Without Borders correspondent, since it was founded in 1985, fitted into the

pattern of many press freedom violations recorded in Gambia over several years, in which the intelligence services are the main suspects or those designated to carry it out. Reporters Without Borders has finally uncovered the fact that Deyda Hydara was threatened and under security services surveillance just a few minutes before he was killed, a few hundred metres from a police barracks.

Despite evidence of a political crime, the official investigation went nowhere. In June, the intelligence services published a "confidential report" on its investigations, complacently going into the journalist's private life and building up absurd theories about the motives for the killing. In fact, it was used to denigrate Hydara and to create a diversion.

The year ended on a scandal. After refusing to allow a representative of Reporters Without Borders into Gambia, the government sent an armed police riot squad unit to block access to the scene of the crime to Hydara's friends and family, who had planned to pay tribute to him there on the first anniversary of his death.

GUINEA

The aging regime of Lansana Conté does not hide its irritation with insolent journalists. The privately-owned Guinean press has won a hard fought right to criticise the government or head of state. The satirical press, battered, threate-

ned and attacked, has become very powerful, even though, when the police are sent out on shabby crackdown operations, they don't make any exceptions. Every year journalists are beaten up or treated as though they were gangsters.

KENYA

Political change in December 2002, gave rise to much hope for the fight against corruption, nepotism, abuse of power and poverty. But the socio-economic situation has scarcely changed and the private press, which is in the vanguard of democratic demands, often pays a high price for it.

An incident pitting the first lady against the private press is revealing of the simmering tensions between the government and journalists. On 2 May 2005, shortly after midnight, the wife of President Mwai Kibaki, Lucy, accompanied by her body guards and Nairobi's police chief stormed into the offices of the leading press group, the Nation Media Group. Lucy Kibaki staged a sit-in at the office for several

hours during which time she insulted and threatened the journalists whom she said had been "unfair" and demanded their immediate arrest. The altercation, which received wide media coverage, ended badly. A cameraman was brutally attacked by the president's wife. The case ended up in the courts.

In this large democracy, economic and political platform of East Africa, press freedom is a reality, even though journalists are exposed to all kinds of public and political violence. Even if press offences are no longer punishable with prison sentences, fines slapped on newspapers by judges appointed by the president on the basis of their "loyalty" can reach disproportionate levels.

LIBERIA

One of West Africa's most damaged countries is undergoing a relatively peaceful democratic transition, under the watchful eye of the international community. But roaming child soldiers, endemic poverty, criminals still at large and profiteers of every stripe remain a threat. Independent journalists are on occasion under threat of political and public violence.

Between the two rounds of the presidential elections in October and November, journalists who had taken a critical line with one candidate, George Weah, were attacked by uncontrolled militants of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC). The party leadership's humble apologies have however allowed a return of a semblance of confidence.

MADAGASCAR

This huge African island enjoys a real pluralism of information and a relative freedom of expression, despite a bad law that has never been reformed. The most serious problem lies elsewhere. Too often, Malagasy politicians use the press as weapons. As a result violent political quarrels between a former and a current minister can be played out there, ending in court, where journalists face prison for defamation.

Reporters Without Borders has constantly stressed the absurdity of this situation. Moreover a new communications law decriminalising press offences which President Marc Ravalomana has been promising for five years, has never been put before parliament. The reform is in such a muddle, according to one Malagasy journalist that "the press no longer knows what law it is controlled by".

MALAWI

A curious press case in March 2005 got people talking about this small country pinched between Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania. The head of state's wounded pride put two journalists through an unhappy episode. Along with many other international media, the correspondent for the *BBC* and one working for *Reuters* reported comments made by the president's religious affairs advisor to the effect that the president had decided to move out of his

official residence, because he heard "strange noises" and "felt a presence prowling around him" at night. The head of state had been "made to look ridiculous", the public ministry said. The journalists were arrested at dawn like bandits, thrown in prison for 24 hours and then charged. In a country that has not imprisoned a journalist since the end of the military regime of Kamuzu Banda, in 1994, this incident was surprising, not to say ridiculous.

MALI

A mysterious assault, apparently linked to a journalist' infamous reputation, should not detract from the fact that Mali is one of Africa's most democratic models. Certainly the law is not perfect, the press is poor and the politicians are sometimes irritable but press freedom is a reality.

MAURITANIA

The banal sounding “1991 law on press freedom” had for nearly 15 years allowed President Maaouiya Ould Taya and his government to order more than 100 seizures of independent Mauritanian newspapers. Arrests of journalists, articles cut out, publications banned, an omnipresent political police, taboo subjects, manipulation of public media, state lies, police brutality were the daily lot of a press proud of its independence, and sometimes its insolence towards an ever more despotic government. Mauritania had become a closed, sealed and tyrannical country towards its journalists and human rights activists.

One August morning in 2005, the police chief peacefully overthrew the regime while the presi-

dent was on a visit to Saudi Arabia. He immediately promised to restore democracy within two years and began by getting voted a law banning him from seeking a mandate at the end of the period of transition, a ban that also extended to his all his ministers. He gathered the opposition, civil society and the press to hammer out a timetable and to set common objectives. In this context, Reporters Without Borders sent the new authorities its recommendations that the reform of the legislature should conform to international democratic standards. During a visit to Nouakchott in October, the organisation persuaded the new head of state to end censorship and resume broadcasts in the capital by *Radio France Internationale (RFI)*. Reporters Without Borders also helped draw up a new press law.

MOZAMBIQUE

The independence of the courts has healed many of the wounds of this large Portuguese-speaking southern African country, scarred by an interminable civil war (1976-1992). Heavy sentences handed down in 2004 to the killers of journalist Carlos Cardoso, gunned down in the street on 22 November 2000, contributed to an improvement in working conditions for reporters, even if there are still occasional episodes now and then. Only the escapes from prison, as spectacular as they were suspicious, by the sus-

pected leader of hired killers "Anibalzinho", cast a shadow over this case which so deeply marked Mozambican society. But the man was rearrested while seeking political exile in Canada and sent back to Maputo to face his judges. At the start of December 2005, Anibalzinho abruptly changed his line of defence, denying any involvement in the Carlos Cardoso murder, despite the evidence, confessions of accomplices and his own confession, in 2003, to a representative of Reporters Without Borders.

NIGER

The famine that hit the country, one of the world's poorest, destabilised the government. As a result, in spring 2005, journalists taking part in the widespread public demonstrations, fell foul of the law and were imprisoned, in a country

that is however relatively stable in terms of press freedom. However the frequent promises to decriminalise press offences made by President Mamadou Tanja, but never kept, look more and more like election slogans.

NIGERIA

Nigerian journalists, accustomed to cruel military juntas and police raids, have good reason to be disappointed. The restitution of power to a civilian government, in 1999, under former military figure President Olusegun Obasanjo, has not protected them from political persecution or abuses by the infamous State Security Service (SSS). Around 20 journalists suffered physical attacks in 2005, around a score spent time in prison. The hospital or the police station are often a forced part of a Nigerian journalist's rounds.

Meanwhile, the head of state, holding the rotating presidency of the African Union (AU), promoted

himself to be the continent's "peace-maker". Deaf to the appeals of international organisations for greater democratisation, unmoved by repeated press freedom violations, he is a poor manager of a diverse federation made up, among others, of an oil-rich delta in the south and a northern region now under the sway of fundamentalist imams.

The privately-owned press is robust, pluralist and populist. It does not mince its words about the powerful. Its outspokenness, won through years of "guerrilla journalism", secret meetings and under-the-counter distribution, is general.

RWANDA

The “land of a thousand hills” was deeply traumatised by the genocide of the Tutsis in 1994 and in particular by the disturbing role played by Hutu “hate media”. As a result, Paul Kagame’s government keeps under surveillance, punishes, harasses and threatens all defiant voices. In consequence, the Rwandan press has become extremely nervous, even servile. The few critical publications, such as the privately-owned weeklies *Umuseso* and *Umuko*, suffer harassment, protracted trials, and outright seizures. It is not unusual for Rwandan journalists, who have upset the “barons” of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR), to flee the country.

In one particularly sickening case in 2005, Belgian priest Guy Theunis, former editor of the magazine *Dialogue* produced in Rwanda before the genocide and former Reporters Without Borders’ correspondent, was in September dragged before the courts and accused of being an “instigator” of the

genocide. His accusers claimed, among other things, that he had published extracts from extremist publications. An investigation by Reporters Without Borders proved that the charge against Theunis was completely fabricated. It appeared that a handful of individuals, motivated by personal or political grudges, had crudely framed him. Theunis had been the victim of a personal vendetta by some government supporters who took advantage of his visit to Rwanda to make him pay for his religious commitment, condemnations of human rights abuses committed by the FPR, or simply for personal score-settling. Thanks to pressure from the international community, he was transferred to Belgium two months after his arrest.

At the same time, a journalist on *Umuko*, who made the mistake of condemning the poor running of a gacaca, had to face the “parody of justice” organised by the judge whom he had exposed.

SENEGAL

Faced with an outcry over the imprisonment in 2004 of journalist Madiambal Diagne, President Abdoulaye Wade promised to reform the press law. Senegalese journalists are still waiting and the situation has not improved. Quite the contrary.

Early on the morning of 17 October 2005, a police commando raided and closed *Sud FM* radio in Dakar and arrested everyone present in its offices and studios. The radio's correspondents were arrested in Ziguinchor in the south and at Saint-Louis in the north. All the relay stations were taken off air. What "crime" had *Sud FM* committed?

It had broadcast an interview it carried out with a leader of a rebel group active in Casamance.

The case of Idrissa Seck, former prime minister who was ousted, taken to court and thrown in prison for alleged financial misdeeds, also contributed to the deteriorating climate between the press and the government. Some investigative journalists with contacts in the case were summoned, questioned and threatened. In these circumstances, the independent press which had thoroughly applauded the changeover of political power when President Wade took office in 2000, became more and more wary or to put it another way more and more critical.

SIERRA LEONE

The year 2005 began with a journalist in prison. During the summer his acting editor at the weekly *For di People* died from injuries suffered when he was beaten up by henchmen sent by a deputy in the ruling party. At the end of the year, Paul Kamara, the founder of *For di People* was finally released after spending 14 months in jail. Sierra Leone, which has barely recovered from a horrendous civil war (1991-2002) largely fails to provide its journalists with peaceful working conditions. Not only is the country, under UN supervision, painfully attempting to build a democratic frame-

work, but a cruel law allows journalists to be thrown in prison on the basis of vaguest of accusations. In these conditions, an impoverished and disparate written press has to deal with a society mired in corruption, a heavy legacy of violence and draconian laws.

At yearend there were some signs of hope: President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah said he was ready to reform press law, which if he sticks to his promise could be a first encouraging step towards a genuine improvement in press freedom in Sierra Leone.

SOMALIA

A nation without a state, a collection of territories in the grip of warlords, Somalia has been a sea of anarchy for almost 15 years. In these circumstances, the privately-owned media, in a country that is mostly poor and illiterate, often find themselves the playthings of the powerful. Beatings, harassment and arrests were their lot again this year, from Puntland in the north-east to Kismaayo in the south-east. The warlords who give the orders have absolute command of their regions. Even if a transitional government was set up, in Nairobi at the end of 2004, under international supervision, freedom of the press in Somalia is a flickering and endangered beam.

Two women journalists were cold-bloodedly shot dead during the year. Kate Peyton, 39, a special correspondent for the *BBC*, and Duniya Muhiyadin

Nur, 26, a journalist on privately-run *HornAfrik* radio. In both case, the killers are still at large.

The warlords, at the head of their little armies, allow no criticism of their clan, sub-clan, financial interests or national ambitions. Journalists who offend them can expect several days or hours in solitary confinement followed by banishment from the town. At least four journalists have been treated in this way on a whim of the authoritarian governor of Middle Shabelle province, Mohamed Dhere. He has however the ear of the new prime minister, to the extent that the transitional administration has chosen to set itself up in his town of Jowhar. In the secessionist regions of Somaliland and Puntland, the local civil administrations do not balk at making up new rules with the sole objective of silencing their critics.

SUDAN

The year 2005 was noteworthy for an extremely rare event: the official lifting of censorship. On 11 July, in front of a gathering of several African presidents, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, and numerous US and European officials, President Omar al-Bashir lifted the emergency laws. However overnight on 5-6 August, Sudanese security forces burst into printers for two Arabic-language dailies, ordered a halt to printing and seized all the available copies. As in the censorship era, the agents gave no official reasons for their actions. That said, no act of censorship has been recorded since. What was previously routine for Sudanese journalists, has become an exception.

The long civil war that tore Sudan apart for 21 years was characterised by tight surveillance of the press. One example of this permanent harassment, was the English-language daily the *Khartoum Monitor*, which tended to favour the southern rebels, paid the price of the rage of a sensitive government up until the final days of the emergency laws. The newspaper frequently suffered “very special treatment” – arrests, censorship, seizures – from a state security which closely monitored and punished the private media according to the interests of the government.

TANZANIA

There is genuine press freedom in Tanzania, despite the extreme susceptibility of some politicians or businessmen with a weakness for litigation for defamation. The media sector is large and mostly

responsible. One black spot is Zanzibar. The government on the semi-autonomous island often attacks the independent press, accusing it of being “a threat to national unity” at the first sign of criticism.

TOGO

From a dictatorial situation in which the mildest criticism of the regime was seen as a crime of state, the country of President General Gnassingbé Eyadéma slowly began to evolve. Under European Union pressure, Togo decriminalised press offences. Even if the government remained extremely sensitive and had no hesitation in attacking disobedient journalists, unfair arrests, abusive suspensions and death threats were less common. The death of the patriarch, on 5 February 2005, after 38 years in power, followed by a “velvet coup” by his son Faure, seriously

shook up the political landscape and a private press that was looking to become more radical. As a result, the election campaign was marred by street violence and police blunders of which journalists were often the targets. Order was finally restored but the gulf between the media and government deepened. Critical journalists say that they are still under surveillance and sometimes punished, in a throwback to the times of dictatorship. The press is often politicised and for some, self-censorship amounts to a survival reflex.

UGANDA

Pluralist and serious, Uganda's written press is the sounding board of the country's political crises. The *Daily Monitor*, belonging to the Aga Khan's powerful Nation Media Group, largely dominates the media landscape. As a result, it has been the target of attacks from President Yoweri Museveni who, despite his new civilian mode, has not lost his old authoritarian habits. This was the case after the death of south Sudan leader John Garang on board a Ugandan presidential helicopter. Radio stations, which host popular debates, were caught up in the political tensions. Journalist Andrew Mwenda, who discussed the day's burning

news issues and raised the questions ordinary people were asking, faced a court accused of "sedition".

Since the airwaves were liberalised in the 1990s, Uganda's press and radio have displayed their independence and provided thoughtful coverage of the news. The success of phone-in talk shows and "ebimeeza", live public debate, is based on a respect for journalistic ethics and a striking a balance in political views expressed. This rigour has allowed the privately-owned media to acquire credibility with its listeners and to be capable of defending itself effectively.

ZAMBIA

As so often in Africa, the Zambian press has been an easy scapegoat whenever the political climate deteriorates. In Zambia, where press offences come under criminal law, government partisans can use unfair laws to throw any journalist in prison at whim. In consequence, criticising the head of state is a high risk exercise for editorialists. In June, a radio commentator was questioned for having read out a fax containing a reader's complaints and newspaper-sellers have been bru-

tally attacked by militants in the presidential party. One of the most renowned journalists on the country's sole privately-owned daily, *The Post*, Fred M'membe, was the subject of a 24-hour police manhunt after the head of state took legal action against him. He had published an editorial in which he questioned the capacity of Levy Mwanawasa to govern the country more seriously, condemning the president's "foolishness, stupidity and lack of humility".

ZIMBABWE

Since 2002, southern Africa's former "bread basket", has sunk into an unprecedented economic crisis but also into tyranny. The anti-western obsession of the government has pushed it into annually sharpening its already draconian legislative arsenal. Control mechanisms systematically crush even the slightest hint of criticism. Excessive sentences - 20 years in prison for "publishing false news" - are laid down for all those who fail to respect the rules imposed by the all-powerful ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

In 2005, as one might expect, the situation worsened still further for independent journalists. The electoral campaign for the 31 March legislative poll was a model of injustice for the opposition, while the government used its new cooperation with China to scramble the signal of the *SW Radio Africa*. Arrested and threatened with harsh prison

sentences, staff on independent media and correspondents for the foreign press, are often taken before the courts or flee the country, even temporarily, to avoid prison.

The Media Information Commission (MIC), in the guise of a media self-regulation body, is in reality the government's control and censorship office. Chaired by an associate of Robert Mugabe, it has the power to grant or cancel media licences, to issue or withdraw journalists' accreditations. Those found in contravention face two years in prison.

In these conditions, 2005 was a new year of struggle for the *Daily News*, once the country's most popular paper. Today, unlicensed and with dwindling resources, it continues to defend itself before every possible judicial body in a bid to be allowed to reappear.