

# Press freedom under fire

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KINSHASA, DRC: Only two months after its creation, the Congolese media regulation body, CSAC, is already in the firing line of press freedom activists. The nongovernmental organisation, Journalist in Danger (JED) has called for its immediate abolition.

"We are demanding the effective abolition of the Higher Council for Broadcasting and Communications (CSAC) by president Kabila. This body has proved incapable of assuming its independence", declares JED general secretary, Tshivis Tshivuadi. The demand comes after "numerous cases of interference by politicians and security services in the affairs of the media".

The antagonism goes back to the 2011 electoral campaign, when the CSAC laid out rules to be observed by local media in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) over the electoral period.

According to JED, "an organisation for the defence and the promotion of press freedom in Central Africa" based in Kinshasa, the CSAC, which was supposed to be impartial, showed "excessive clientelism" by punishing some media organisations close to the opposition "for not playing by the rules".

## Confusion

Two pro-opposition television channels in the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, Radio Lisanga Television (RLTV) and Canal Futur TV, have been banned from broadcasting.

"Our transmitter has been disconnected on November 28 by this body which fanatically supports Kabila. The next day, we received a notification from CSAC which blamed us for broadcasting 'statements that violated the rights of a rival'. Our broadcasting signal is still blocked to this day", explains a Canal Futur TV journalist, who has asked to remain anonymous.

The print press was also forced into silence during the 2011 presidential and legislative elections. Daily newspapers *Le Phare* and *La Colombe* were suspended for reasons that remain unclear. Despite the suspension, the two dailies continue to publish, in defiance of CSAC's interdict.

On the other hand, other media, which are usually close to the government, seem to be immune from sanctions or suspension.

"Lushima Ndjate, a TV host on national television who has been continuously defaming opposition candidates on air, has

never received any sanction. Today, he is seeking protection from the police, as he "fears for his life", the journalist adds.

## **'Journalist in danger'**

The situation has drawn the attention of nongovernmental organisation Journalist in Danger. "The campaign regulations had double standards during the electoral period. The Congolese National Radio and Television used more than 80% of its airtime to promote president Kabila and most journalists were singing the praises of presidential candidates. CSAC officials did not do their job, so the regulatory body must be abolished", explains Emmanuel Kabongo-Malu, a consultant at JED.

"We are still assessing the state of affairs for our press. We were only established two months ago. Give us four years and there will be improvements. Many criticisms against us are not unfounded. It's all about emotion at JED, where tribalism is on display. Most of its employees are from Tshisekedi's ethnic group (Etienne Tshisekedi was Kabila's great rival in the 2011 presidential elections)", says Tito Ndombe, who is in charge of the CSAC Socio-Economic Commission.

Meanwhile, employees at Canal Futur TV and RLTV are still awaiting a decision from CSAC in order to resume broadcasting. A decision that might take some time to come: "The CSAC secretary and reporter explained to us that there was a power cut in the building. As a result of this technical problem, no work can be done and no case has been processed to this day".

Source: [allAfrica.com](http://allAfrica.com)

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