

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

3 November 2017

NGA106001.E

Nigeria: Brown envelope journalism, including types of publications that are affected; efforts to combat the phenomenon (2015-November 2017)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

According to sources, brown envelope journalism in Nigeria refers to the bribing of a journalist (Ibbi 20 June 2016, 4; Al Jazeera 27 Dec. 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Deputy Editor of Investigations of *Premium Times*, a Nigerian newspaper, who has written on brown envelope journalism in Nigeria, speaking on his own behalf, stated that

brown envelope journalism is a situation where journalists are given cash (mostly in brown envelopes, hence the name), expect to be given cash or even demand cash after a press conference, media events, interviews ... by the person or company they are covering or reporting. (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017)

The same source explained that "[t]he cash is mostly disguised as a gift, transportation fare or money to buy gas" (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017). In an article on unethical practices in the field of journalism in Nigeria, Andrew Ali Ibbi, an academic who is part of the Mass Communication Department at Elizade University in Nigeria, states that brown envelope journalism "could translate into things like parcels of land, automobiles or even the sponsorship of a holiday to a dream country of the journalist" (Ibbi 20 June 2016, 4).

Ibbi further explains that "[t]hough the reason for giving the money will not be stated at the point of giving, it is the amount that suggests that the giver wants something from the journalist in return" (Ibbi 20 June 2016, 4). Al Jazeera similarly reports that "ostensibly, the money is to cover journalists' travel costs and other expenses. However, the understanding is clear; the money affects the way the story is reported" (Al Jazeera 27 Dec. 2015). According to the Deputy Editor of Investigations, "sometimes, people who pay specifically ask [a journalist] to report a certain slant. Other times, they just expect [a journalist] to write the report in their favour, without saying it openly" (Deputy Editor Investigations 3 Oct. 2017). However, in an interview with the Research Directorate, a Nigeria-based novelist and journalist who has published articles on Nigerian social issues for *The Guardian*, Reuters and BBC, including an article on brown envelope journalism in Nigeria, stated that the provision of brown envelopes with cash "does not always mean that a journalist will write a report with a certain slant; the brown envelope can be regarded as a token of appreciation for the journalist's time and effort, knowing that journalists are not paid well in Nigeria" (Journalist 6 Oct. 2017).

According to sources, brown envelope journalism occurs because journalists in Nigeria are poorly remunerated (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017; Al Jazeera 27 Dec. 2015; Ibbi 20 June 2016, 4) or are not paid on time (Journalist 6 Oct. 2017; AP 12 Feb. 2013; Ibbi 20 June 2016, 4). According to the Deputy Editor of Investigations, a brown envelope can contain more than a few months' salary for a journalist (Deputy

Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017). In an interview with Al Jazeera, Femi Adsina, the Nigerian Presidential Advisor of Media and Publicity, stated that "when journalists are not paid, they are prone to being compromised," but that "even some who are well-paid" take brown envelopes (Al Jazeera 13 Sept. 2015).

Sources report an example of brown envelope journalism when the founder of the Synagogue Church in Lagos bribed journalists in 2014 to report in his favour after his church building had collapsed, leading to deaths (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017; Al Jazeera 13 Sept. 2015; Ibbi 20 June 2016, 4)

2. Prevalence of Brown Envelope Journalism

Sources indicate that corruption remains an issue in the media industry of Nigeria (Freedom House 28 Sept. 2016; EJN 16 Mar. 2015, 49), "particularly in the form of small cash gifts that sources give to journalists" (Freedom House 28 Sept. 2016). According to a report by the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) [1], in some countries, including Nigeria, "'brown envelopes' and under-the-table cash payments to reporters and editors are part of the routine exercise of journalism" (EJN 16 Mar. 2015, iii). The Deputy Editor of Investigations stated that brown envelope journalism "is so widespread that those who [refuse] to collect are generally seen as outcasts or people acting more sanctimonious than their colleagues" (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017). The Journalist explained that "while brown envelope journalism may be regarded as corruption outside of Nigeria, within Nigeria, it is just seen as a standard way in which journalists are paid. It is part of the status quo and not necessarily regarded as a negative phenomenon" (Journalist 6 Oct. 2017).

Sources indicate that it is common for brown envelopes containing cash to be handed out to journalists at news conferences in Nigeria (BBC 5 Mar. 2015; Al Jazeera 13 Sept. 2015). The Journalist explained that "it is common that editors of media outlets are on the payroll of politicians" and that "there is an understanding between them: 'you're my friend - I'll take care of you, if you take care of me'" (Journalist 6 Oct. 2017).

When asked how common it is for ordinary citizens to bribe journalists to create or modify news stories, the Deputy Editor of Investigations stated that it is "very common" (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017). In contrast, the Journalist indicated that it is not common for ordinary citizens to bribe journalists to create or modify news stories (Journalist 6 Oct. 2017). The same source explained that while it is uncommon, it is possible if they are able to "pay the price tag" (Journalist 6 Oct. 2017).

3. Types of Publications Affected

Sources indicate that all types of publications in Nigeria are affected by brown envelope journalism, including blogs (Journalist 6 Oct. 2017; Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017), magazines and newspapers (Journalist 6 Oct. 2017). According to the Deputy Editor of Investigations, broadcast news outlets are also affected (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017). The Deputy Editor of Investigations provided the opinion that "brown envelope journalism was institutionalized by the traditional mainstream media" (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017).

4. Efforts to Combat Brown Envelope Journalism

According to the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) [2], at a March 1998 meeting held during a forum organized by the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) [3], a Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists was ratified by the Nigerian Press Organization (NPO) [4], which is made up of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) [5], NGE and Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) [6] (NGE n.d.a). Article 7 of the Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists states that

7. Reward and Gratification

- i. A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information.
- ii. To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as a fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event. (Nigeria 20 Mar. 1998)

The Deputy Editor of Investigations indicated that the Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists is not enforced, because it does not have a status of a law (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017). According to the same source, journalists "are only expected to be guided" by the code (Deputy Editor Investigations 3 Oct. 2017).

Sources indicate that electronic media is regulated by the Broadcasting Code (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017; Nigeria 1996). The Deputy Editor of Investigations explained that the Broadcasting Code "has nothing to do with the individual conducts of journalists" and that it "mainly deals with the propagation of hate speech, things said on air, advertising, technical requirements and political [campaigning] on electronic media" (Deputy Editor of Investigations 3 Oct. 2017).

According to the Journalist, in Nigeria there are media organizations that have an "internal 'no brown envelope journalism' policy" (Journalist 6 Oct. 2017). In further correspondence, the Journalist provided a newspaper clipping titled "Ethical Complaints" from the 10 October 2017 edition of *PUNCH*, a Nigerian newspaper, which states that it and its journalists do "not demand or accept gifts or gratification to publish articles or photographs" and that it requests that its journalists are not given gifts or gratification (*PUNCH* 10 Oct. 2017). It further states that ethical complaints about a *PUNCH* journalist can be submitted to the newspaper and provides an email address and phone number (*PUNCH* 10 Oct. 2017). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] EJN is a UK-based non-profit entity and "international network of media professionals created to advance education, particularly education in ethics and respect for human rights" (EJN n.d.).

[2] NGE is a non-governmental association for Nigerian editors (NGE n.d.b).

[3] NPC is a "parastatal established by the Nigerian Press Council Act No. 85 of 1992 (as amended in Act 60 of 1999) to ensure the maintenance of high professional standards for the Nigerian [p]ress" (Nigeria n.d.). The NPC's functions "revolve around ethical standards" and the NPC "enquire[s] into complaints against the [p]ress from the [p]ublic" (Nigeria n.d.).

[4] NPO is "an umbrella body for the major stakeholders in the [media] industry" including the NUJ, NGE, and NPAN (Nigeria n.d.).

[5] NUJ is "a professional media organisation aiming to connect journalists [across Nigeria] with the information and opportunities they need to advance professionally and improve media in Nigeria" (Connect Nigeria n.d.).

[6] NPAN is "a professional body concerned with the regulation of journalism in Nigeria" (PM News 27 May 2016).

References

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PM News. 27 May 2016. "[Newspaper Proprietors Meet Buhari.](#)" [Accessed 12 Oct. 2017]

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Academic studying mass communication, Elizade University; Al Jazeera reporter; Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre; Ethical Journalism Initiative; Ethical Journalism Network; International Consortium of Investigative Journalism; International Press Centre; Nigeria – Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, National Broadcasting Commission, Nigerian Press Council; Nigerian Presidential Advisor of Media and Publicity; Nigerian Guild of Editors; Nigerian Institute of Journalism.

Internet sites, including: Africa Confidential; All Africa; Amnesty International; CBC; *De Volkskrant*; Deutsche Welle; eci.net; *The Economist*; *El País*; Ethical Journalism Initiative; Factiva; *The Guardian*; Human Rights Watch; International Consortium of Investigative Journalists; International Crisis Group; International Press Centre; IRIN; *Jane's Intelligence Review*; *Nigerian Tribune*; NOS Journaal; *Premium Times*; Radio France internationale; Radio Free Europe; Reporters without Borders; *The Nation*; *The New York Times*; Nigeria – Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, National Broadcasting Commission, Nigerian Press Council; Nigerian Institute of Journalism; Nigerian Union of Journalists; *Punch Newspaper*; Transparency International; UN – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Refworld; US – Department of State.

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