Conditions for the press in the Democratic Republic of Congo remained poor in 2014. A journalist was killed for the first time in more than six years, and restrictive laws were frequently used to prosecute journalists in connection with their work. Ongoing conflict in the east of the country made reporting there extremely difficult.

Legal Environment

Although the 2005 constitution and various laws provide for freedoms of speech, information, and the press, these guarantees are seldom enforced. The government’s control over the courts hinders impartial adjudication of cases against journalists, and verdicts often reflect political bias.

Criminal defamation laws were frequently used to detain and intimidate journalists in 2014. In August, for example, Senator Francis Kaniki filed a complaint against journalists Michael Mukebayi and John Tshingombe of Congo News over an article that accused the senator’s brother, Cardinal Laurent Pasinya, of illegally soliciting funds. Later that month, police arrested Mukebayi, while Tshingombe went into hiding; Mukebayi remained in detention at year’s end. According to the Observatory of Freedom of the Press in Africa (OLPA), other journalists detained for defamation during the year included Michel Tshiyoyo of Espérance in June, Achico Ngaya Madingama of Nouvelles du Soir and
Daniel Safu of Points in July, Eric Masimo Matuka of C-News in November, and Luron Nyamuinga of E-Radio in December—all of whom published investigative work pertaining to the government. In a positive development in April, authorities granted amnesty to Patrick Palata of Canal Congo Télévision, who had been detained for three years for “participating in an insurrectionist movement.”

Media outlets are regulated by the High Council for Broadcasting and Communication (CSAC), which has the power to temporarily suspend outlets for hate speech and other serious ethical transgressions. The council has been criticized as politically biased and indifferent to press freedom concerns.

In August 2014, the Ministry of Information declared 75 newspapers defunct for not publishing over the previous three years, and banned another 61 newspapers for lack of registration. Observers questioned the ministry’s authority to ban newspapers, noting in part that while the 1996 press law requires papers to register, they do not need a permit to publish. Moreover, many of the papers in question denied lacking registration or failing to publish in the last three years.

**Political Environment**

Many media outlets display political bias. State-owned broadcasters reportedly favor President Joseph Kabila’s party, though other ruling political parties are occasionally given airtime. Private outlets owned by partisan figures and affiliated businessmen are often used for political propaganda rather than objective reporting. The only independent radio network with nationwide reach, Radio Okapi, is funded by the United Nations and Switzerland-based Fondation Hirondelle.

Journalists and media outlets face censorship and harassment from government officials, members of the security forces, and nonstate actors, though the little-used internet remains unrestricted. The government continued to suspend broadcasts and shutter outlets for their reporting in 2014.

In October, Sébastien Impeto, the acting governor of Équateur Province, ordered the suspension of Radio Equateur after he faced criticism from its hosts. In November, Information Minister Lambert Mende ordered the shutdown of the community radio stations Télévision Graben Beni, Liberté Beni, Télévision Rwanzururu, Ngoma, and Furu for alleged affiliation with the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group. Journalists at the outlets denied the charges. Six days later, Mende publicly accused Radio Television Lubumbashi Jua of incitement and insurrection and called for its closure. The decision was reportedly a reaction to the station’s criticism of a government proposal to amend the constitution and allow Kabila to seek a third term.

Among other instances of content-based restrictions, for nearly three weeks in January, authorities shut down Manono Community Radio in Katanga Province for “disturbing public order.” In May, an official in Kolwezi, Katanga, prohibited media outlets from “initiating or sharing declarations of a political or administrative nature from traditional leaders, including information about mining companies, international organizations and NGOs working in their administrative subdivisions, without the area administrator’s stamp.
or signature of approval.” In June, officials banned local media in Likasi from broadcasting political information. In July, the CSAC banned reporting on Muslim communities in North Kivu Province that were celebrating Eid al-Fitr, in order to foster “peace and peaceful cohabitation.”

Journalists and their outlets faced threats and actual violence on several occasions during 2014. In June, army officer Dido Bilali reportedly threatened Radio Liberté for its reports about his alleged abuses. A day later, the National Intelligence Agency threatened a journalist after he reported that the governor of Bandundu Province had embezzled 11 million Congolese francs ($12,000). In July, police beat journalist Fabrice Yembo and cameramen Delo Demolo and Girèssé Mabiala as they reported on a protest. Yembo and Demolo sustained injuries in custody, and their equipment was confiscated. Cameraman Rubens Belengel of Antenne A TV was arbitrarily detained while covering a protest the following week.

Arbitrary detention, extrajudicial questioning, threats, and kidnapping are widespread in the country’s conflict-plagued east. Following the January assassination of Colonel Mamadou Ndala in Beni, officials obstructed coverage of the incident, notably by threatening reporters including freelancer Alain Wandimoyi, Austere Malivika of Voice of America, and Keny Katombe of Reuters. In May, armed men intimidated South Kivu—based radio journalists David Munyaga and Bienvenu Malega for informing media in Burundi about the Burundian army’s alleged training of a paramilitary youth wing of Burundi’s ruling party on Congolese soil. In November, the governor of Orientale Province, Jean Bamanisa, issued a number of threats against Bunia-based Radio Okapi journalist Jean-Paul Bisila.

Two journalists were killed in 2014, and another was badly wounded. In February, ADF rebels ambushed a Congolese army vehicle in Oïcha, killing embedded Radio Télévision Muungano journalist Germain Muliwavyo, while two of his colleagues sustained injuries. Muliwavyo was the first journalist killed in connection with his work in the country in more than six years. In October, a man shot and wounded cameraman Philémon Gira of Congolese National Radio and Television (RTNC) in the eastern city of Goma and stole his camera and tapes. In December, two men shot and killed radio reporter Robert Chamwami of RTNC, also in Goma; their motive was unclear.

Economic Environment

According to Ministry of Communication data from 2012, there were 134 television stations, 463 radio stations, and 445 newspapers registered in the country. The hundreds of privately owned radio and television stations operate alongside three state-owned radio stations and a state-owned television station. The British Broadcasting Corporation and Radio France Internationale are available in several cities on FM radio. Given its low literacy rates and deep poverty, the population relies largely on radio broadcasts to receive news. Only a few stations, including the state broadcasters and internationally funded Radio Okapi, have nationwide reach. While internet access has spread in urban areas thanks to the proliferation of private and affordable internet cafés, only about 3 percent of the population used the internet in 2014. Journalists at major media outlets are
usually poorly paid and insufficiently trained, leaving them vulnerable to bribery and political manipulation.

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