

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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TOGO: Radio Silence

The announcement of the death of President Gnassingbé Eyadéma, in power since 1967, has provoked a new wave of intimidation against the independent media and opposition parties, aimed at muzzling all dissident voices during the period of transition of power. Two days after the announcement of the former head of state's death, the Togolese government banned all street demonstrations for two months, justifying this measure by decreeing "national mourning", for this same period.

"Given the systematic repression of all opposition when the maintenance of power is at stake, it is to be feared that respect for the period of national mourning serves only as a pretext to ban all expression of dissident political opinion", said Amnesty International today.

Interventions by the President of the *Haute Autorité de l'audiovisuel et de la communication (HAAC)*, High Audio-Visual and Communication Authority, demanding that a programme scheduled by *Kanal FM* should not be broadcast, the forced entry into the offices of *Radio Nostalgie* by two gendarmes on Tuesday 8 February 2005, and the seizure of broadcasting material from *Radio Lumière*, shows that the Togolese authorities are ready to use all available methods of intimidation to impose "Radio Silence" on the independent media.

"The Togolese authorities continue, as in the past, to pressurise the independent media in spite of their commitment to respect the freedom of expression, made in April 2004, within the framework of negotiations with the European Union," said Amnesty International today.

The reference by certain private media to an appeal by six parties, on 7 February 2005 calling on the Togolese to observe two civic strike days in the country *"to express their rejection of the military coup"* seems to have been one of the reasons for the government's latest attempt to muzzle the independent media.

The Togolese authorities have also tried to prevent debate about the current situation in Togo. On 8 February 2005, the HAAC President demanded that directors of the *Kanal FM* radio station interrupt the broadcast of a round-table debate.

After these interventions, several private radio stations chose to broadcast only music. Others refrained from making any news broadcasts, restricted themselves to disseminating general information and avoided any debate that might provoke further reaction from the authorities.

Despite this enforced caution, the Togolese authorities have continued to forcibly muzzle the media. On Thursday 10 February 2005, gendarmes seized all the broadcasting material belonging to the

private radio station, *Radio Lumière*, located at Aneho, 50 km to the east of the capital Lomé. The radio had broadcast the declaration of a member of the opposition that same morning.

In addition, all directors of private radio stations in Lomé were called to a meeting by the HAAC President on the morning of Thursday 10 February 2005, in the presence of the Togolese Armed Forces communications officer. During this meeting, the latter singled out certain private radio stations and openly threatened them. He said that: *"We have targeted certain stations that I am going to name, Nana FM, Radio Nostalgie, Kanal FM and Radio Maria. We want you to know that we have the means to put an end to this. It is up to each of you to act responsibly."*

The Togolese authorities have also taken steps against some of the international media. Two Radio France International (RFI) transmitters stopped broadcasting in FM for a few days on Tuesday 8 February 2005, officially because of a technical breakdown. On the same day, RFI's special envoy was refused a visa at the Benin border although other foreign journalists were able to enter Togo. RFI was also the target of attacks by Mr Pitang Tchalla, Minister of Communications, on 7 February 2005. He publicly accused RFI of having "launched a disinformation and destabilisation campaign".

"Nothing can justify this new pressure on the media and we fear that this repression may end in arrests and more serious abuses of the freedom of expression", said Amnesty International today. *"We asked the Togolese authorities to end this intimidation and respect their obligations as set out in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the international treaties that Togo has ratified".*

CONTEXT

Following the death of President Gnassingbé Eyadéma, the Togolese armed forces announced, on 5 February 2005, that Faure Gnassingbé, son of the late head of state had been named President of the Togolese Republic. The following day, the President of the National Assembly, who should, in accordance with the Constitution, take over as caretaker leader pending presidential elections within two months, was dismissed and replaced by Faure Gnassingbé. At the same time, the Constitution was modified to permit the new president to serve the rest of his father's term, until 2008. In his first speech to the nation on 9 February 2005, Faure Gnassingbé, expressed his wish for *"the organisation, as soon as possible, of free and transparent elections that reflect the will of the people"* without mentioning whether he was referring to the legislative elections due this year or the presidential election.

The international community has unanimously condemned this transfer of power, described by the African Union as a *"military coup"*. The Permanent Francophone Council, meeting in extraordinary session on 9 February 2005, strongly condemned *"the coup carried out by the Togolese Armed Forces and the blatant and repeated violation of all constitutional provisions"* and declared *"the suspension of Togolese representatives from the International Francophone Organisation and the suspension of multilateral francophone cooperation"*.