

M. Elie Dote,
Premier ministre de la République centrafricaine

London,
12 December 2005,

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

ARTICLE 19 is seriously concerned with the Central African Republic's (CAR) approach to the media and freedom of expression.

The recent 29 October 2005 declaration of interim Transport Minister Fidel Gouandjika "to re-establish censorship in order to educate journalists" expresses a direct threat to press freedom. Despite the public defence presented on 14 November 2005, such remarks are very worrying.

ARTICLE 19 wishes to remind you that the CAR ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in 1986. Under the country's new 2004 constitution, Article 13 recognizes that "freedom to inform, to express and to express opinions is guaranteed," as is press freedom and access to information. Freedom of expression is indeed a basic right, essential to the development and workings of a democracy.

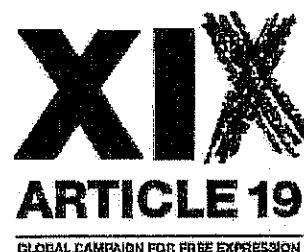
However the legal mechanisms in place in CAR are not sufficient to guarantee freedom of expression. ARTICLE 19 therein condemns:

- Recurring government censorship of the media and violations of all forms of freedom of expression; the decree made on 6 December 2005 against musicians and their freedom to determine the tone of their messages; the ban on radio and television stations' broadcasts of songs that are said to "harm development in the country";
- Mr. Gouandjika's defamatory remarks equating the station "Radio Ndeke Luka" to "Radio des milles collines" (radio station in Rwanda that incited hatred during 1994 genocide).
- The series of death threats uttered in May 2005 against journalists Zéphirin Kaya and Patrick Akibata by members of the presidential guard.

ARTICLE 19, in solidarity with Fondation Hironnelle, calls on your government to immediately stop this threatening approach toward the media and to respect and guarantee freedom of expression in full.

Sincerely,

Agnès Callamard
Executive Director



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Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.'