



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Senegal: ARTICLE 19 Condemns Criminal Defamation Sentences of Newspaper *Walf Grand-place*

The newspaper Walf Grand-Place was sentenced to an exorbitant fine of 10 million CFA Francs or US\$ 21,000 while two of its journalists, Faydy Drame and Jean Meissa Diop, reporter and editor-in-chief respectively, were sentenced to 6 months prison with bail.

“We are profoundly shocked by the judgment against the newspaper Walf Grand Place and its two journalists. The sentence is disproportionate and contradicts international standards and good practices on freedom of the press.” said Dr. Agnes Callamard, Executive Director of ARTICLE 19.

The sentencing of the two journalists follows a criminal defamation case filed by Matforce, a Hyundai dealership, against the newspaper Walf Grand-Place. According to Matforce, the way their dispute with Groupe Technobase/Alcom was reported by Walf Grand-Place in their June 10-11 edition was defamatory. The two articles in question reported that a model of car purchased by Technobase/Alcom was defective.

According to a well-established international principle, no one should be sued for having reported the defamatory comments of another party if the following three conditions apply:

- The comments are part of a discussion on a matter of public interest;
- The individual reporting the comments has not personally endorsed these comments;
- It is made obvious that the comments were not made by the reporter but by someone else.

“We are surprised by the decision and have filed an appeal. The articles in question are very balanced and merely relate the opinions of the two parties in this conflict. The journalist has acted in good faith and with professionalism in the treatment of this affair” commented Ndene Ndiaye, lawyer for Walf Grand-Place.

ARTICLE 19 condemns the use of prison sentences, even with bail, as a way of punishing defamation, and asks the appeal court to carefully examine this case in accordance with the international standards regulating freedom of expression.

“This verdict reminds us that Mr. Wade’s 2004 promise to decriminalize defamation has not yet come into effect”, continues Agnès Callamard.

ARTICLE 19 calls on President Wade to use the second term of his presidency to decriminalize defamation, as criminalization of press offenses is currently a tool for repression of the press. This will constitute a great opportunity for Mr. Wade to help Senegal recover its reputation as a democratic stronghold in Sub-Saharan Africa, a reputation tarnished by multiple violations of freedom of expression in his previous presidential term.

NOTES:

For more information, please contact Fatou Jagne-Senghor at fatou@article19.org or by phone at +221 820 95 13 or Illia Djadi at illia@article19.org or by phone at +44 20 7278 9292

ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.