



## COVID-19 Response in Africa: Together for Reliable Information

This briefing is part of the COVID 19 Response: Together for Reliable Information programme, supported by the European Union

# Senegal: Briefing on attacks against journalists

March 2020–July 2021

### At a glance

Global Expression  
Report 2021 score:

**75/100**

**2**

journalists  
physically attacked

### About this briefing

Journalists play a vital role in ensuring the right to freedom of expression and access to information, which is protected under international human rights law and Senegal’s Constitution. The protection of media freedom becomes even more relevant during a pandemic.

However, physical attacks and arbitrary arrests against journalists during the first year of COVID-19 – all of which took place against a backdrop of excessive police force – violated this fundamental right, putting media freedom and journalists’ safety at grave risk, as this briefing shows.

**We urge the Government of Senegal to follow the recommendations in this briefing to ensure the right to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists are guaranteed – especially in the COVID-19 pandemic.**

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## Physical attacks against journalists

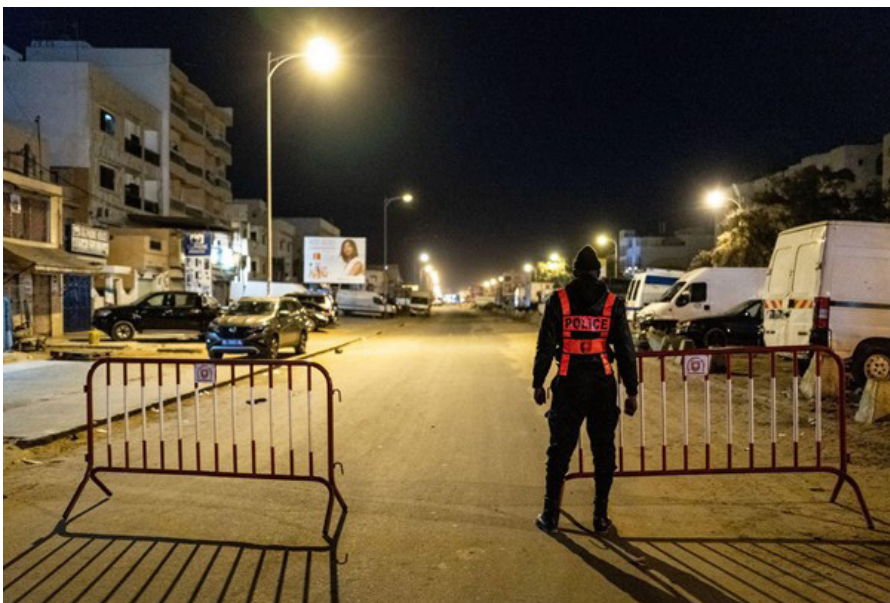
The protection of journalists and human rights defenders, and ending impunity for attacks against them, is a global priority for safeguarding freedom of expression. Threats, attacks, arbitrary arrests, and detention, and, in the gravest cases, enforced disappearance or killings, constitute not only a violation of the right to freedom of expression but also a violation of the right to life and bodily integrity, and sometimes the right to health. Physical attacks are those that inflict pain, harm, or injury, including death, against a person.

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### Police officer beats journalists reporting on curfew in Touba

On 24 March 2020, the Government of Senegal imposed a curfew to curtail the spread of COVID-19. The very next day, [a police officer beat reporter Awa Ndiaye and camera man Ousseynou Mbodj](#), from the private Islamic channel Touba TV, who were reporting on implementation of the curfew in Touba. The two journalists said the police officer refused to consider their authorisation to move around and report on the curfew.

Awa Ndiaye suffered bruises from the attack and was taken to hospital for examination before being released a few hours later. Although the attack was reported in the press, no prosecution was made.



Police occupy a checkpoint in the Parcels Assainies suburbs during the curfew, which had been put in place from 8pm to 6am, one of the measures the government introduced to try and slow the spread of the coronavirus. (Photo: Sylvain Cherkaoui/Panos Pictures)

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## Freedom of expression under international law

Everyone has the right to express themselves freely – orally, in writing, and online. The right to freedom of expression includes the right to access information, which is particularly important in a pandemic. It is guaranteed under the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), the [International](#)

[Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), the [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#), the African Commission's [Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa](#), and the [Constitution of Senegal](#).

While the right to freedom of expression is fundamental, it is not absolute. Under international law, freedom of expression can be limited for the purposes of protecting public health – but any limitation must be **legitimate**, **necessary**, and **proportionate** (Article 19 of the ICCPR).

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# Recommendations

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Government of Senegal to:

- **Ensure that interferences with the right to freedom of expression on grounds of public health** are not only provided for by the law and necessary but also enforced in the least intrusive and least restrictive possible manner.
- **Investigate all reports of human-rights violations perpetrated against journalists**, and ensure that all perpetrators – including law-enforcement officers – are brought to justice in a trial meeting international fair-trial standards.
- **Remind all law-enforcement and Gendarmerie personnel of their duty to protect communities** and ensure the media can play their critical role of informing the public.
- **Adopt the recommendations of the [resolution on the safety of journalists](#)**, adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on 6 October 2020, which provide guidance on ensuring the safety of journalists in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.