

Nigerian publisher Agba Jalingo detained without charge

Nigerian authorities should immediately release publisher Agba Jalingo and halt their harassment of journalists reporting on alleged corruption and other issues of public interest, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



Image source: Gallo/Getty.

On August 22, in Lagos, police officers with Nigeria's special anti-robbery squad arrested Jalingo, publisher of online news outlet *CrossRiverWatch*, according to Attah Ochinke, Jalingo's lawyer, and Jeremiah Achibong, an editor at *CrossRiverWatch*, who spoke with CPJ over the phone.

On August 23, authorities transferred Jalingo to a detention facility run by the anti-cult and anti-kidnapping police in Calabar, the capital of Nigeria's southern Cross River state, and are holding him there without charge, Ochinke said.

"Nigerian authorities should immediately release Agba Jalingo and permit *CrossRiverWatch* journalists to cover issues in their state without harassment," said Angela Quintal, CPJ's Africa program coordinator, in New York. "The arrest and intimidation of journalists in Nigeria for their critical reporting is unacceptable, as is holding Jalingo for days without charge."

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Before his arrest, Jalingo told CPJ over the phone that, on August 16, he was invited for questioning by police officers in Calabar over a complaint brought by the state-owned Cross River Microfinance Bank. On July 17, *CrossRiverWatch* had [reported](#) on alleged corruption involving the bank and Benedict Ayade, the governor of Cross River state.

According to a copy of the police invitation, which CPJ reviewed, Jalingo was summoned because his name was mentioned in a police investigation of “Conspiracy to cause Unrest and Conduct likely to Cause Breach of Peace, reported by the Cross River Microfinance Bank.”

The invitation requested Jalingo attend an interview with Calabar police on August 19. Jalingo told CPJ he informed the police that he would honor the invitation when he returned to Cross River state on August 26. Police arrested him in Lagos on August 22.

Achibong and *CrossRiverWatch* reporter Ugbal Jonathan told CPJ that they believe Ayade is retaliating against *CrossRiverWatch* for the outlet’s critical reporting. Achibong and Jonathan were both arrested in Cross River state earlier this month, according to [CPJ reporting](#).

In a phone conversation with CPJ, Christian Ita, Ayade's spokesperson, declined to comment on *CrossRiverWatch's* corruption allegations and said he read in the press that Jalingo’s arrest was related to his alleged involvement in the #RevolutionNow protests, held on August 5, and denied Ayade’s involvement in the arrest.

CPJ’s calls to the Cross River state police commissioner, Austin Agbonlahor, and his spokesperson, Irene Ugbo, went unanswered. A member of the board of the Microfinance Bank, Godwin Akwaji, told CPJ via phone that he was not in position to speak about the corruption allegations or the bank’s allegations against Jalingo.

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