

Congolese journalist jailed for one year for insulting governor

Authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo should not oppose journalist Steve Mwanyo Iwewe's appeal of a year-long prison sentence for insulting a provincial governor, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



Congolese police officers hold back members of the media in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, on January 12, 2019. Journalist Steve Mwanyo Iwewe was recently fined and sentenced to one year in jail for insulting the governor of Équateur province. Credit: CPJ/Jerome Delay/AP.

Iwewe, a reporter at the privately owned broadcaster Radio Television Sarah, was convicted on March 1 in the Mbandaka criminal court on a charge of insulting Équateur Governor Bobo Boloko Bolumbu, according to the journalist's lawyer, Souverain Pontife Ikolombe, who spoke with CPJ. Iwewe was sentenced to one year in prison and instructed to pay \$200 in damages to Bolumbu, his lawyer said; Iwewe is currently in Mbandaka central prison, where he has been detained since his arrest on February 27.

Ikolombe told CPJ that he will appeal the judgment tomorrow at the Tribunal de Paix de Mbandaka appeals court, alleging that the original trial was improperly held.

Iwewe is the first journalist [CPJ is aware of having been imprisoned](#) in the country since president Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo took office on January 24.

"The Democratic Republic of Congo may have a new president, but it seems the ambition to censor journalists whom the

authorities find undesirable is unchanged," Angela Quintal, CPJ's Africa program coordinator, said in New York. "Governor Bobo Boloko Bolumbu should not contest Steeve Mwanyo Iwewe's appeal, so his conviction can be overturned and he can be released."

Iwewe was arrested and beaten by the governor's security agents on February 27 in Mbandaka while covering Bolumbu's arrival at a protest against an increase in state taxes, according to his lawyer. Security officers told Iwewe to stop filming and taking photographs, but the journalist refused, Ikolombe told CPJ.

"You came here to do your work, let me also do mine freely," Iwewe told the officers when they told him to stop reporting, according to local press freedom group [Journaliste en Danger](#). The governor then ordered Iwewe's arrest for insulting him, Ikolombe told CPJ.

CPJ's repeated calls and WhatsApp messages to Bolumbu spokesperson Rossi Bolekwa went unanswered. CPJ also called Trésor Nsaebeinga, the director of Radio Television Sarah, but did not get a response.

The lawyer said that Nsaebeinga and Yanick Mbombo, another reporter at the station, had gone into hiding for fear of arrest following Iwewe's detention.

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