

Cameroon reporter Ahmed Abba given 10-year prison sentence

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is outraged by the 10 year prison sentence issued to Ahmed Abba, a Hausa-language reporter for Radio France Internationale, by Yaoundé military court in Cameroon.



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A judge announced the sentence after Abba, who has been detained for the past 20 months, was convicted at the 17th hearing in his trial, on 20 April. The journalist has also been condemned to a massive fine on a charge of “laundering the proceeds of a terrorist act”. The fine imposed by the court is 55 million CFA francs (about 85,000 euros).

“This sentence is outrageous,” said Clea Kahn-Sriber, the head of RSF's Africa desk. “After months of judicial persecution, this journalist has been given an utterly disproportionate sentence although the prosecution produced no hard evidence. This is a clearly political decision designed to scare all journalists, especially those who might try to cover the security situation in northern Cameroon.”

Arrested on 30 July 2015 in connection with his coverage of attacks by the terrorist group Boko Haram in the north of the country, Abba was held incommunicado for the first seven months, until finally taken before a judge until on 29 February 2016, and was tortured during the period spent incommunicado.

After the trial began, the military court repeatedly ignored the requests for Abba's release on bail that his lawyers submitted

at each of the 16 hearings prior to the last one, at which he was convicted. Following yesterday's sentencing, Abba's lawyers announced that they would appeal.

In a statement yesterday, Radio France Internationale [said it was “stunned by the verdict”](#) and pointed out that it had provided “irrefutable evidence” that Abba never condoned terrorism in his reporting. Abba “just did his job as a journalist,” RFI director Cécile Mégie said.

During the trial, Abba's lawyers repeatedly accused the court and the prosecution of [procedural abuses](#), especially at the hearing on 6 April, and insisted that [expert reports](#) requested by the prosecution were inadmissible.

On 20 April, at the 18th and final hearing before sentencing, Abba was found not guilty of condoning terrorism but was convicted on the charges of failing to report a terrorist act to the authorities and laundering the proceeds of a terrorist act. The prosecution had requested a life sentence on the latter charge.

The charge of failing to report a terrorist act was based on a visit that Abba made to a locality that had been attacked by Boko Haram. But Abba went to this locality with local officials, who found out about the attack at the same time as him. The other charge, laundering the proceeds of a terrorist act, is based solely on the flimsiest of evidence dating back to 2010.

Cameroon is ranked 126th out of 180 countries in [RSF's 2016 World Press Freedom Index](#).

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