

Three Cameroonian journalists charged with criminal defamation

COTONOU, Cameroon - The Committee to Protect Journalists has called on Cameroonian authorities to immediately halt the prosecution of three journalists after a judge on October 9 changed the charges against them mid-trial.



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Authorities on October 28, 2014, originally charged the journalists with "non-denunciation" for failing to disclose information and sources to the state that could harm national security under Article 107 of Cameroon's Criminal Code, according to CPJ [research](#).

During the October 9 military court hearing, the trial judge charged Félix Cyriaque Ebolé Bola, the sub-editor of the daily *Mutations*; Baba Wamé, a journalist and online journalism instructor at the University of Yaoundé 2; and Rodrigue Tongué, a journalist with Canal 2 Television, with criminal defamation for their "complicity in attempting to insult" President Paul Biya in place of the 2014 charges, according to one of the journalists who wished not to be named for fear of reprisal and Fojou Pierre, one of the journalists' defense lawyers.

"The shift in charges against Bola, Wamé, and Tongué shows that Cameroonian authorities had no real case against these journalists in the first place," said CPJ Africa program coordinator, Angela Quintal, from New York. "Their prosecution has been a travesty of justice since the start and the journalists should be finally free to continue their work without fear of reprisal."

Cameroon communication minister Issa Tchiroma Bakary did not reply to numerous calls from CPJ.

The case is adjourned until October 18 for closing arguments, according to the journalist.

If convicted, the journalists face one to five years in prison, and a fine of 20,000 to 20 million Central African francs (US\$36 to \$35,988), according to Article 153 of Cameroon's [criminal code](#), and the online newspaper [Le Bled Parle](#).

Pierre told CPJ that the new charge against the journalists has no standing since the journalists have not published anything that insulted the president.

According to [media reports](#) quoting Claude Assira, another of the journalists' defense lawyers, a complaint from the accuser is required to proceed with insult charges. However, the defense team has not received such a complaint from President Biya.

The 2014 charges relate to an investigation the journalists were conducting into allegations that members of the Cameroonian security forces were colluding with a leader of an armed group from the Central African Republic, according to the news website [Camer.be](#). The journalists never published an article on this subject, [according](#) to news website *Financial Nigeria*.

According to CPJ [research](#), the three journalists' 2014 charge was accompanied by a ban on publishing news-related material until January 2015.

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