

Broadcast regulator closes down radio station

The Committee to Protect Journalists condemns a decision by Nigeria's media regulatory body to shut down a radio station in connection with a broadcast that questioned the local government's motives in an anti-polio vaccination program.

The federal government-run National Broadcasting Commission issued a statement on 22 February 2013, saying it had revoked the license of the private station Wazobia FM in the northern city of Kano, according to news reports. The station has been off the air since.

Authorities accused the station of violating a part of the Nigerian Broadcasting Code that prohibits the use of language "likely to encourage or incite crime, or lead to disorder," according to the Nigerian press freedom group Media Rights Agenda. The commission did not include specific examples of the show inciting crime or disorder. Awwalu Salihu, spokesman for the commission, also told CPJ that he would not give any specific examples.

"Nigerian authorities closed Wazobia FM because they did not like its critical coverage, and then they cloaked their decision in highly charged but unsupported allegations of incitement," said CPJ Africa advocacy co-ordinator, Mohamed Keita. "We call on the National Broadcasting Commission to reverse this censorship order immediately."

The decision stemmed from a 6 February edition of *Sandar Girma*, a daily Hausa-language talk show in which Wazobia host Yakubu Musa Fagge accused local officials of corruption and coercive tactics in their handling of a polio immunisation campaign, according to a translated transcript done by Agence France-Presse.

Fagge said that officials in Kano were refusing to get their own children vaccinated because of their beliefs, but were forcing the "children of commoners" to do so. He suggested the vaccine was harmful and said the officials had opposed the program for years, but had only now begun to force children to receive them because unspecified Western officials had promised them unspecified amounts of money in return.

Authorities in Kano state had boycotted a polio vaccination program between 2003 and 2004, with officials, including then governor Ibrahim Shekarau and local clerics, calling it a US-led conspiracy to make Muslim women infertile, according to international news reports. Shekarau, who is now a top traditional chief, eventually embraced the practice.

In the broadcast, Fagge also commented on reports of an altercation from earlier that day. The journalist described a confrontation between immunisation workers and a private citizen who was trying to prevent the vaccination of his child. Mubarak Muhammad Sani, a Wazobia reporter who witnessed the dispute, said he was attacked in the confrontation and his equipment seized.

Shortly after the show, the National Broadcasting Commission indefinitely suspended the program, according to

Mohammed Suleiman, another Wazobia FM journalist. On 12 February, authorities filed charges against Fagge and Sani, including criminal conspiracy, abetment, defamation of character, obstruction of a public officer carrying out his duty, intentional insult, and incitement to violence, according to news reports. Police also said the journalists' comments on the air could have had led unidentified gunmen to kill nine polio workers on 8 February, although the government has not produced any evidence to support the statement.

The 11-member commission, established by the military junta of Gen. Ibrahim Babaginda, possesses sweeping control over mandatory licensing and regulation, according to news reports. The commission is not required to hold a public hearing prior to revoking the license of a media outlet. A 2001 study conducted by Article 19 found that the commission's regulatory powers were "broad and vague," its licensing process "arbitrary and susceptible to discriminatory application," and its restrictions on content "excessive and contrary to international standards."

Source: [allAfrica](#)

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