

Cameroon arrests radio journalist

Cameroonian authorities must immediately release broadcaster Akumbom Elvis McCarthy from detention and ensure that the country's military courts are not used to prosecute journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



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A military tribunal on April 10 ordered that McCarthy, a news broadcaster for Abakwa FM Radio, a privately owned broadcaster based in Cameroon's Bamenda region, be remanded in custody for a renewable six-month period while police investigate claims that the journalist aired secessionist propaganda, a person familiar with the details of the case, who asked not to be named for fear of reprisal, told CPJ.

"Akumbom Elvis McCarthy should not have been arrested in the first place and should be immediately released without charge," said CPJ Africa program coordinator Angela Quintal. "We condemn Cameroon's use of a military tribunal to prosecute a civilian, which is in violation of international law."

Police on March 20 arrested McCarthy while he filmed police allegedly harassing taxi drivers and commuters in Bamenda, the capital of the Northwest region, according to the independent Cameroon News Agency and the person familiar with the case. McCarthy reports in pidgin for the station, which also publishes news on its Facebook page.

McCarthy, who also contributes to the privately owned news website Bamenda Online, was detained in Bamenda by judicial police for three weeks before appearing briefly at the military tribunal on charges of attempted secession and disseminating

secessionist propaganda on air, the person familiar with his arrest told CPJ. The tribunal ruled that McCarthy be detained in Bamenda Central Prison, the person said.

CPJ's repeated attempts to reach Communication Minister Issa Tchiroma Bakary on his cell phone for comment were unsuccessful. The station manager at Abakwa FM did not immediately respond to CPJ's calls seeking comment.

The person with whom CPJ spoke said that McCarthy believes security forces were monitoring him for several months because of his outspokenness on air and on social media about political unrest in Cameroon.

During questioning, judicial police accused McCarthy of being sympathetic toward the self-proclaimed interim government of Ambazonia in his reporting, the unnamed person told CPJ. Ambazonia is the name that secessionists use to refer to Cameroon's English-speaking regions, which the secessionists declared independent on October 1, 2017.

In November last year, gendarmeries raided McCarthy's home, beat the journalist, and accused him of being an "Amba terrorist", according to reports and conversations CPJ had with the journalist at the time. McCarthy told CPJ last year that his phone, laptop, audio recorder, and cash were seized in the raid.

In September last year, CPJ published, *Journalists not Terrorists: In Cameroon, anti-terror legislation is used to silence critics and suppress dissent*, a special report that documented how journalists in the country faced reprisal for their reporting.

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