

Malian politician kicks reporter

Apparently upset over election coverage, a Malian politician has assaulted a journalist.

Bamako - A few days after being assaulted and threatened by a parliamentarian-elect, a reporter in southern Mali has filed a complaint in a local court.

Local politician Mamadou Sinayoko attacked reporter Adama Coulibaly, a presenter at community Radio Kafo-Kan in the southern city of Bougouni, 740km south of the capital Bamako, on July 23. Sinayoko kicked Coulibaly in the ribs, knocking him out of his chair, said Radio Kafokan director Seydou Koné. Coulibaly was not seriously injured, but complained of pain after the assault, Koné said.

"For a public official to assault a journalist is disgraceful," said Joel Simon, executive director of the media rights organisation, Committee to Protect Journalists. "We call on authorities to hold to account Mamadou Sinayoko for this violent attack, which brings Mali's already-deteriorating state of press freedom to a new low."

Coulibaly pressed assault and battery charges, and Radio Kafo-Kan pressed similar assault charges as well as trespassing charges against the politician, Koné said. Sinayoko defended the attack, saying it was self-defence. He then sued the reporter for "outrages and broadcastings false news," according to Agence France-Presse.

The assault was linked to an argument between Coulibaly and Sinayoko about Coulibaly's coverage of the preliminary results of the second round of parliamentary elections held July 22, according to Koné. Sinayoko, head of a party allied to President Amadou Toumani Touré's ruling coalition, was provisionally elected with about 52% of the votes, but confronted Coulibaly when the journalist asserted early results indicated otherwise.

Also a correspondent of Bamako-based private Radio Klédu, Coulibaly had initially reported, during a live election-day program on that station, that Sinayoko was trailing in early exit polls, but later confirmed his lead with updated results, Radio Klédu director Kassim Traoré told CPJ. Traoré is also the Secretary-General of Mali's Organization of Young Reporters.

"We have arguments with politicians all the time," he told CPJ. "They are clashes of ideas, never clashes of fists. That someone crosses that line is to be condemned." The organization and Mali's press union, Maison de la Presse, issued statements condemning the attack.

Coulibaly was the second Malian journalist assaulted by a public official since 2000. Reporter Chahana Takiou of the private biweekly newspaper *L'Indépendant* was nearly strangled that August by a member of the National Assembly.

Presidential and general elections in Mali this year saw a level of press repression unprecedented in at least 10 years, as

aggrieved officials settled scores with journalists. This year alone, authorities jailed five journalists, handing them suspended prison terms and fines, charged two others with criminal defamation for writing a story critical of a government minister, and moved to evict a private radio station.

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