

Kenyan journalists assaulted by police at Nairobi airport

NAIROBI, Kenya - The Committee to Protect Journalists has called on authorities in Kenya to immediately investigate the assault of journalists by police at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi on Tuesday. According to media reports and journalists who spoke with CPJ, police officers attacked reporters covering an opposition politician's return to the country, causing injuries to at least two journalists.



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"Authorities in Kenya cannot resolve their political disputes by beating up journalists," said CPJ Africa program coordinator Angela Quintal from New York. "Kenyan authorities must urgently investigate this attack and put an end to any assaults on the press by security personnel, including police forces."

Journalists from several media houses had stationed themselves at the airport Monday afternoon to report on the standoff between opposition politician Miguna Miguna and immigration officials who disputed his right to enter the country, according to media reports. Shortly before midnight, officers began to verbally and physically harass journalists reporting outside an international arrivals terminal while ordering them to leave, according to media reports and video footage.

Two journalists, Stephen Letoo, a political reporter with the privately owned Citizen TV network, and Robert Gichira, a cameraman with the privately owned Nation TV channel, told CPJ that they were beaten by police.

Letoo, who said he was beaten, pushed, and kicked by an unknown number of officers, told CPJ that he momentarily lost consciousness and suffered injuries to his abdomen and limbs. He said he was treated at an airport hospital and discharged after two hours. Letoo told CPJ that two Citizen TV cameramen were also slapped by police officers at the scene.

Gichira told CPJ that he suffered minor injuries to his arms and legs in the attack. A third journalist, broadcast reporter Sophia Wanuna of the privately owned Kenya Television Network (KTN), told CPJ that she narrowly avoided being hit by a baton-wielding police officer while she was reporting live because her cameraman intervened and stopped the officer. Gichira and Wanuna also told CPJ that the officers damaged their camera equipment.

Dennis Itumbi, who heads digital communication for the office of the president in Kenya, said in a Facebook post yesterday that police had "done well". Itumbi suggested that journalists had defied police orders and were filming in unauthorised areas. Reached by CPJ for comment today, Itumbi said that he "did not have the complete story" about whether journalists were "beaten" at the airport and directed anyone hurt during the incident to file a formal complaint.

Police spokesperson Charles Owino declined to provide comment to CPJ, and Inspector General Joseph Boinnet of Kenya's National Police Service did not respond to two phone calls and a text message seeking comment this evening. Ministry of Interior spokesperson Mwenda Njoka told CPJ that the journalists had been in a restricted area of the airport.

Reports by Citizen TV and *The Star* daily newspaper indicated that authorities today continued to deny press access to Miguna, who was still detained at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA).

Press conditions in Kenya have deteriorated drastically in recent months. CPJ documented harassment of and attacks on journalists by security personnel and politicians during the elections in 2017, and in February authorities shut down four television channels in connection with their coverage of an opposition event in Nairobi.

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