

To: President of Algeria Abdelmadjid Tebboune
President of Benin Patrice Talon
President of Burundi Pierre Nkurunziza
President of Cameroon Paul Biya
President of Chad Idriss Deby
President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi
President of Eritrea Isaias Afwerki
Prime Minister of Ethiopia Abiy Ahmed Ali
Prime Minister of Morocco Saad-Eddine El Othmani
President of Rwanda Paul Kagame

Sent via email

6 April 2020

Your Excellencies,

We the 81 undersigned media, press freedom, and human rights organizations are writing to call on your respective governments to release all jailed journalists amid the sweeping COVID-19 pandemic.

Last week, the Committee to Protect Journalists published an [open letter to world leaders](#) urging the immediate release of all journalists imprisoned for their work. Given that a staggering number of these imprisoned journalists are held in jails across the African continent, we are reiterating that call to your respective countries at this time of grave public health concern.

According to CPJ's most recent [annual survey](#) conducted on December 1, 2019, there were at least 73 journalists in prisons in Africa, including 26 in [Egypt](#), 16 in [Eritrea](#), seven in [Cameroon](#), four each in [Rwanda](#), [Burundi](#), and [Morocco](#), three in [Algeria](#), and one each in [Benin](#), [Nigeria](#), [Chad](#), [Tanzania](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Somalia](#), [Comoros](#), [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), and [South Sudan](#).

As of March 31, at least 11 of these journalists have been released from jails in Somalia, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Nigeria, DRC, Algeria, Comoros, South Sudan, and Egypt, according to CPJ research. However, at least six more journalists and media workers have been jailed since December 1, and remain in prison as of March 31, including four in [Ethiopia](#) and one each in [Cameroon](#) and [Algeria](#).

Article 16 of the [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) states, “Every individual shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health.” These rights were extended to prisoners and detainees when the African Commission adopted the 1995 [Resolution on Prisons in Africa](#).

According to the [World Health Organization](#), “People deprived of their liberty, and those living or working in enclosed environments in their close proximity, are likely to be more vulnerable to the COVID-19 disease than the general population.”

For journalists jailed in countries affected by the virus, freedom is now a matter of life and death. Imprisoned journalists have no control over their surroundings, cannot choose to isolate, and are often denied necessary medical care.

Many of these journalists have been held in detention without trial for lengthy periods and are suffering from ill health exacerbated by underlying health conditions and overcrowded prisons, where they have contracted malaria, tuberculosis, and other diseases.

We urge you to release every jailed journalist in your respective countries and to protect the free press and the free flow of information at this crucial time. Journalism must not carry a death sentence.

Sincerely,

- AccessNow
- African Centre for Media and Information Literacy (AFRICMIL)
- Africans Rising
- amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism
- Article 19
- Association des Journalistes Burundais en Exil (AJBE)
- Association des journalistes du Burkina (AJB)
- Association des journalistes indépendants du Bénin (AJIB)
- Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE)
- Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE)
- Cameroon Association of English-speaking Journalists (CAMASEJ)
- Cameroon Community Media Network (CCMN)
- Cellule Norbert Zongo pour le journalisme d'investigation en Afrique de l'Ouest/Norbert Zongo Cell for Investigative Journalism in West Africa (CENOZO)
- Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
- Centre for Human Rights & Democracy in Africa (CHRDA)
- CIVICUS
- Civil Rights Defenders

- Coalition for Whistleblowers Protection & Press Freedom (CWPPF)
- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
- Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO)- South Sudan
- Le Conseil national des patrons de presse du Togo (CONAPP)
- Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organisations (CEHRO)
- EG Justice
- Eswatini Editors' Forum
- INK Centre for Investigative Journalism (Botswana)
- Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ)
- Free Press Initiative (FPI)
- Gambia Press Union (GPU)
- Groupe d'Action pour le Progrès et la Paix (GAPP-Afrique) (Canada, Bénin, Mali)
- Guild of Professional Bloggers of Nigeria
- Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-U)
- Index on Censorship
- Institute for Media and Society (IMS)
- International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR)
- International Press Centre (IPC)
- International Press Institute (IPI)
- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
- Internet Sans Frontieres (ISF)
- Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA)
- Kenya Editors' Guild (KEG)
- Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ)
- La Maison de la presse du Niger
- Laws and Rights Awareness Initiative (LRAI)
- Ligue des journalistes Tchadiens
- MARUAH (Singapore)
- Media Council of Tanzania (MCT)
- Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
- Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)
- Media Monitoring Africa (MMA)
- MENA Rights Group
- Namibia Media Trust (NMT)
- Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ)
- Odhikar (Bangladesh)
- Observatoire de la Liberté de la Presse en Afrique (OLPA)
- One Day Seyoum
- Organisation Patronale des Médias du Gabon (OPAM)
- Paradigm Initiative (PIN)
- Patronat de la presse tchadienne
- PEN Eritrea
- PEN Nigeria
- Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (PTCIJ)
- Press Union of Liberia (PUL)
- Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme de l'Afrique Centrale (REDHAC)

- Réseau des Journalistes Burundais pour la CPI (RJB-CPI)
- Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme en Centrafrique (RJDH-RCA)
- Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF)
- Right2Know (South Africa)
- Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
- Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)
- Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS)
- South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF)
- Syndicat National des Journalistes Indépendants du Togo (SYNJIT)
- Syndicat des Professionnels de l'Information et de la Communication du Sénégal (SYNPICS)
- Syndicat National des Professionnels de la Presse de Côte d'Ivoire (SYNAPP-CI)
- Syndicat National des Journalistes du Cameroun (SNJC)/Cameroon Journalists' Trade Union (CJTU)
- The African Editors Forum (TAEF)
- Tournons La Page (TLP)
- Union Burundaise des Journalistes (UBJ)
- Union of Tanzania Press Clubs (UTPC)
- Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ)
- Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ)

cc

African Union chairperson President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa

African Union Commission Chairman Moussa Faki

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus