



The Director General,
Gendarmerie Nationale,
Lomé, Togo

Accra, February 16, 2017

Dear Director General,

Assault on Journalist - Request for an Independent Inquiry

The Institut des Médias pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (IM2DH) based in Lomé and its partner, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) based in Accra Ghana, have followed with keen interest the story of the recent physical and moral assault on a reporter of the *L'Alternative* bi-weekly newspaper, Robert Kossi Avotor, on February 7, 2017 by elements of the national gendarmerie.

The journalist had gone to report on an eviction exercise at Akatoviépé, a suburb of Lomé.

Avotor narrates that he arrived at the site dressed in a reporter's vest and holding his press card. Seeing the measures in place – gendarmes armed with truncheons, tear gas and guns, he went closer trying to see the leader for more information about the operation.

An argument ensued between the security officers and Avotor; the situation degenerated with the gendarmes beating up the journalist. He was handcuffed at the back, detained in a command vehicle, and taken to the Sagbado Brigade where he was detained until about 14:00 GMT.

Avotor says he can identify by name one of the gendarmes who inflicted the inhuman and degrading treatment on him. He also declares that two people on board a 4x4 vehicle with an unknown registration number, asked about the geographic location of his residence from some young people in his suburb.

Furthermore, the journalist has indicated that he lodged complaints on February 8 and 10, 2017 against the officer whom he identified and the national gendarmerie respectively.

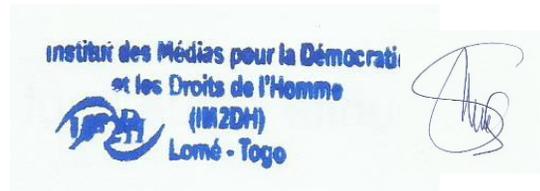
In view of the above, the IM2DH and MFWA believe the security of journalist Avotor is threatened.

The two institutions therefore urge the Ministry of Defence and the Director General of the national gendarmerie to protect and guarantee the security of Avotor.

We condemn this kind of violence, which is an attack on freedom of expression and on the journalist's right to freely exercise his profession. We call on the authorities of the national gendarmerie to carry out a thorough inquiry into the matter and ensure that the perpetrators of these acts of abuse get punished in accordance with the applicable laws in Togo.

The act of brutality against the journalist has a potential to intimidate other media professionals. It also reflects negatively on the image of the national Gendarmerie. We therefore believe that the authorities will recognise the urgent need to take action to assure the public that the deviant conduct of the gendarmes involved is not condoned or approved by the institution.

Yours sincerely,



Bonaventure N'Coué Mawuvi
(President, IM2DH)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, likely belonging to Sulemana Braimah, the Executive Director of MFWA.

Sulemana Braimah
(Executive Director, MFWA)

CC:

- Minister of Defence and Veterans
- Chairman of the National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH)
- Ombudsman of the Republic
- Secretary of State in charge of Humans Rights at the Ministry of Justice and Relations with State Institutions.