



Media Foundation for West Africa

La Fondation des Médias pour l'Afrique de
l'Ouest (MFWA)

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February 14, 2023

H.E. President Umaro Sissoco Embalo
President of the Republic of Guinea Bissau
Office of the President
Praça dos Heróis Nacionais
Bissau, Guiné-Bissau

Dear President Umaro Sossoco,

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), which promotes press freedom and media development across West Africa, and its partner organisations in Guinea Bissau bring you warm compliments and wish you a prosperous 2023.

We are writing in connection with the new media license fees jointly announced in December 2022 by the media regulator and Ministry of Communication, to seek your kind intervention to get the charges reduced.

Under the new tariffs, one will need to pay 500,000,000 CFA Francs (about USD \$800,000) to acquire licence for commercial television with national coverage. This figure represents at least a 6000% increase on the previous fees which were 7,000,000 CFA Francs (about USD \$10,000).

The newly announced tariffs also require payment of 10,000,000 CFA Francs (USD \$16,000) to acquire a licence to operate a radio station with national coverage. Renewal for this category also shot up by up to 900%.

Following the announcement of the new tariffs, the media industry and journalists' unions in Guinea Bissau have expressed grave concern. These concerns are informed by the following facts:

1. The fees are among the highest in the sub-region and are excessive within the context of Guinea Bissau's small economy. As you are aware, the economy was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in a negative 1.4% GDP growth in 2021. As the media also operates in this frail economy, its ability to keep afloat financially has also been greatly undermined. In Cote d'Ivoire, which has a GDP of USD \$70 Billion (2021), the highest amount that anyone would pay for a licence to operate any type of media is 100,000,000 CFA Francs (about USD \$160,000).
2. The media sector is already beset with issues of low revenue, low wages and generally poor working conditions. The tariff increment is therefore considered a threat to media freedom and access to information in the country.
3. The media is already struggling to pay and renew the old licensing fees which led to 79 radio stations being shut down on April 7, 2022

over failure to regularise their broadcast licence status. It is feared that this hike in tariffs may result in the future shutdown of more radio stations over their failure to fulfil their financial obligations to the government.

4. Even before the new tariffs, the average annual income of 75% of community radio stations from all services – advertising spots, press releases, and partner radio programmes- stood at USD \$1300.
5. Only about 30% of private media organisation have the capacity to generate a monthly income of about USD \$ 2,400 which is used for the running costs of the stations.
6. About 29% of the media organisations are currently operating in rented buildings, paying annual rents ranging from about USD \$360 to USD\$1000. In some prime districts of the capital monthly rental costs can reach up to USD \$400, excluding the costs of electricity, water, internet data and telephone.
7. Many stations go months without being able to pay the full salaries of their workers.

In view of the above, the MFWA calls on the government and the media in Guinea-Bissau to have a frank and constructive dialogue to discuss and adopt realistic tariffs as well as take measures to promote media sustainability and access to information. A

We commend your government for the visionary introduction of the new tax on telecommunication as a fiscal measure to raise funds to boost public investment in, and to improve the national media sector. However, no disbursement has been made from the fund so far. We therefore humbly request that you exploit the huge potential of the new tax to make the needed investment in the media sector in order to ensure a vibrant and sustainable media capable of effectively supporting Guinea Bissau's democracy and development.

We are encouraged by your passion for the development of Guinea Bissau to believe that this petition will receive your kindest consideration

Please accept the assurances of our deepest respect.

Yours sincerely

Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)

Sindicato dos Jornalistas e Técnicos de Comunicação Social
(SINJOTECS),

Rede das Rádios e Televisões Comunitárias (RENARC),

Associação de Mulheres Profissionais de Comunicação Social
(AMPROCS),

Ordem de Jornalistas da Guiné-Bissau (OJGB).

