



**Free Press Unlimited Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Mali
29th Session of the UPR Working Group, Jan/Feb 2018**

Recommendations

Free Press Unlimited calls upon the Government of Mali:

- To ensure that the internet, including social media, remains available at all times and to refrain from shutdowns;
- To investigate all cases of killed and disappeared journalists in Mali swiftly and thoroughly, in order to combat impunity for violence against journalists;
- To ensure a safe enabling environment for journalists working in the North of Mali, by providing protection to journalists, by publicly voicing support for the work of journalists and by investigating and prosecuting any violence against them;

Background

Mali's political and media environments have long been among the most free in Africa. From 2008 to 2011, there were virtually no reports of journalists being harassed. In 2012 rebel fighters overran the North and a military coup ousted the government. The crisis led to a serious deterioration of press freedom in the country. It is currently ranked 72 out of 199 countries ("partly free") in the 2016 Freedom of the Press Index by Freedom House.

The media environment in Bamako and the rest of the South of Mali is relatively open, with sporadic reports of censorship and self-censorship. However, Mali's ongoing conflict in the north and attacks by Islamist militants undermines the security situation, making reporting in some areas of the country a dangerous task for domestic and foreign journalists alike. In 2016, violence, mainly due to ethnic problems, has been reaching Southern parts of the country. Radical Islamists keep recruiting young fighters in the South.

Although there were fewer physical attacks on journalists than in previous years, northern Mali continued to be a dangerous area, with many reporters unwilling to travel there without military or U.N. escorts. Ongoing insecurity and unrest also hindered French and Malian investigations into the November 2013 kidnapping and murder of French journalists Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon. In a clandestine operation in May 2015, French special forces killed a militant associated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb who was believed to have been behind the journalists' deaths. However, their

murders have still not been solved and unclarity around these cases continues to exist. Furthermore, in January 2016 a Malian journalist disappeared, Birama Touré. This disappearance also still has not been resolved. Thorough investigations into these cases need to take place.

Radio continues to be the main media source with the widest coverage of audiences. Only 11.8 per cent of Malians were able to access the Internet in 2017, among the lowest levels in Africa. Sixty per cent of the Malian population is under 25 years old. The traditionally high hierarchic order makes it difficult for young people to make themselves heard, but recently many young Malians went on the streets in order to protest against the political situation and have been increasingly using Facebook to discuss their discontent and to mobilize for protests. This is what probably led to a shutdown of social media in August of 2016, when citizens were unable to access social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. This happened amid protests against the detention of a popular radio host had turned violent. This attempt to intentionally disrupt the freedom of expression undermined the trust of the young generation in the leaders of their country. The government recently was accused of yet another social media shutdown in June 2017. This occurred surrounding the protests opposing the referendum for the new constitution on 9 July. Free Press Unlimited condemns these attempts to censor free speech and free and peaceful dialogue on the internet.