OPEN LETTER

November 2, 2026

H.E. Romuald Wadagni
President
Republic of Benin
Cotonou, Benin

Your Excellency,

An Urgent Appeal for Justice, Mercy, and the Immediate End to the Prolonged Arbitrary Detention of Journalist and Recognized Refugee Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè

We write to you today not only as a group of media defense organizations and human rights defenders across West Africa, but as guardians of human dignity, civic conscience, and the rule of law. We bring you warm compliments from the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and our nineteen partner institutions across the sub-region.

We address your esteemed office with heavy hearts and profound urgency regarding the lingering tragedy of Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè; a Beninese journalist, whistleblower, father, and recognized refugee who has been stripped of his liberty and held in prolonged pre-trial detention for nearly sixteen agonizing months.

We respectfully ask you to hear his story not merely as a legal dossier on a court docket, but as a human life hanging in the balance.

A Voice Silenced, A Refuge Violated

Before he was detained at the Ouidah Civil Prison, Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè was a dedicated seeker of truth. As the founder and Publication Director of the investigative outlet *Olofofo*, he committed his life to exposing public wrongdoing and upholding transparency. After relentless threats placed his very life in jeopardy, he was forced into the painful path of exile, seeking refuge in Togo in 2019. In 2021, he was granted refugee status; a legal protection meant to shield a persecution-weary journalist from harm.

Yet, that refuge was abruptly shattered.

On July 8, 2025, Sossoukpè was invited by the Ivorian Ministry of Digital Transition to participate in the Ivoire Tech Forum traveled to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in good faith. He sought to contribute to Africa's digital future. Instead, on the night of July 10, 2025, armed officers surrounded his room at the Palm Beach Hotel.

When Sossoukpè requested to be brought before a judge, his plea was ignored. Instead, he was taken directly to the VIP lounge of Félix Houphouët-Boigny International Airport, forced onto a private chartered aircraft under armed guard, and flown to Cotonou.

By the morning of July 11, 2025, he was handed over to Beninese authorities, read an arrest warrant from the Court for the Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET), and committed to Ouidah Civil Prison. On July 14, 2025, a pre-trial detention order formally cast him into legal darkness under sweeping charges: "incitement to rebellion," "incitement to hatred and violence," "harassment through electronic communications," and "glorification of terrorism."

The Human Cost of Prolonged Darkness

Your Excellency, behind these severe charges stands a human being whose basic rights and bodily health are eroding day by day.

For seven long months, Sossoukpè was kept in strict solitary confinement, isolated from human interaction and locked away in silence. While his detention conditions have partially relaxed since January 2026, the physical toll of his imprisonment grows heavier. He suffers from chronic respiratory ailments and worsening eye issues; conditions that demand specialized medical care.

It has now been 479 days without a trial date being set.

His case remains trapped in an indefinite state of investigation, never referred to a trial court where he might defend his honour. When his legal defense team sought provisional release on August 6, 2026, to allow him to seek medical treatment, their petition was summarily rejected on August 24, 2026.

Pre-trial detention was never meant to be a sentence before a verdict. In the case of Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè, indefinite imprisonment has become a silent, crushing punishment without a trial.

This prolonged judicial stagnation stands in stark opposition to the principles of justice enshrined in Benin's own laws and international commitments:

- Under Articles 6 and 7 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, to which Benin is a proud State Party, every individual has the right to liberty and security, the right not to be arbitrarily detained, and the right to be tried within a reasonable time by an impartial court or tribunal.
- Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) mandates that pre-trial detention must remain an exceptional measure. Holding Sossoukpè for more than fifteen months without trial is difficult to reconcile with these solemn international guarantees. His forcible transfer from Côte d'Ivoire to Benin also raises serious concerns under the principle of non-refoulement, set out in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and Article II(3) of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the

Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, which prohibit returning a refugee to a country where he or she faces a risk of persecution.

- Article 9 of the African Charter and Article 19 of the ICCPR protect the right to seek, receive, and impart information. Criminalizing journalism and treating whistleblowing as terrorism casts a devastating chill over free expression across our sub-region.

Our Appeal and Call to Action

Your Excellency, justice is measured by the fairness, compassion, and speed with which it protects the vulnerable. Benin has long stood as a beacon of legal tradition in West Africa; allowing a journalist to languish in pre-trial detention without trial diminishes that proud legacy.

While fully respecting the independence of the judiciary, we appeal directly to your conscience and your leadership, to facilitate an immediate, humane resolution. We urge you to direct the Ministry of Justice and Legislation:

1. Take all necessary administrative and judicial measures to bring an immediate end to the endless investigative phase of Sossoukpè's case.
2. Urgently review the necessity of his continued detention and grant him provisional release on compassionate and medical grounds pending the outcome of any proceedings.
3. If he is not released, ensure his case is referred immediately to a competent court so he may face his accusers in a fair, open trial within a reasonable time.
4. Ensure his detention conditions strictly respect human dignity and that he is granted immediate access to specialized care for his worsening respiratory and eye conditions.
5. Ensure that judicial processes are never weaponized to penalize the legitimate practice of investigative journalism or dismantle the protections owed to political refugees.

Conclusion

Your Excellency, nearly sixteen months of silence, isolation, and waiting is enough.

We appeal to your high office to intervene in the case of Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè. Give him his day in court, restore his dignity, and send a clear signal to West Africa and the world that Benin remains a land where fundamental human rights, free expression, and due process are sacred.

We remain confident in your willingness to act decisively and restore hope to a suffering journalist and his family.

In earnest expectation of your prompt and compassionate intervention, please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of our highest regards.

Respectfully submitted by:

1. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
2. Gambia Press Union (GPU)
3. Association Guinéenne des Éditeurs de la Presse Indépendante (AGEPI) – Guinée
4. Syndicat des Professionnels de la Presse de Guinée (SPPG) – Guinée
5. Union des Journalistes Indépendants du Togo (UJIT) – Togo
6. International Press Centre (IPC) Lagos-Nigeria
7. Syndicat des Professionnels de l'Information et de la Communication du Sénégal (SYNPICS) – Sénégal
8. Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG)-Sierra Leone
9. Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP)