Media Foundation for West Africa

August 2026

TOGO WATCH

Freedom of Expression situational report



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KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN AUGUST 2026



The freedom of expression and press freedom environment in Togo recorded one incident of arrest against three media professionals in August 2026. On July 27, 2026, two French filmmakers from Tony Comiti Productions, Sebastian Perez Pezzani and Gaël Mocaër, and their Togolese fixer, Fred Vedomey, were arrested by Togolese authorities. However, their arrest became public only after the Ministry of Foreign affairs disclosed the incident on August 19 and local French media outlets reported it.



The three, Pezzani, Mocaër and Vedomey, were arrested while filming an episode of the documentary series Les Routes de l'impossible in northern Togo. They were arrested on suspicion of espionage and their equipment and passports were seized. Although the police released them after reviewing their footage and found no evidence to substantiate the espionage allegations, they were re-arrested shortly after and confined to a hotel for nearly eight days.

On August 17, the three appeared before the Lomé Public Prosecutor's Office and were placed in pre-trial detention over alleged "false statements" relating to administrative requirements. Authorities alleged that the two French filmmakers had not completed the required visa formalities or obtained the necessary authorisation to work in Togo, while Vedomey was investigated over an alleged discrepancy concerning his profession.

While Tony Comiti Productions maintained that the two filmmakers had obtained a work visa and accreditation from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Arts, the Togolese media regulator, the High Authority for the Regulation of Written, Audiovisual and Digital Communication (HARC), indicated in an August 19 statement that it had received no accreditation request concerning the two filmmakers. The HARC also referred to the requirement under Article 20 of the Press and Communication Code for foreign correspondents and special correspondents to obtain HARC accreditation. The two filmmakers and their fixer remained in pre-trial detention at the time of finalising this report.

MFWA'S POSITION AND CALL TO ACTION



The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) considers the situation that Pezzani, Mocaër and Vedomey find themselves in as unfortunate. We urge Tony Comiti Productions to provide all documentations concerning the accreditation of the filmmakers to the authorities concerned to fast-track their release. We also call on the HARC to liaise with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Arts to secure all documentations already filed with the Ministry to facilitate the process.

Moreover, releasing them will also help the country to manage perceptions which may seem to project the country as risky for reporting by both local and foreign media professionals, which may end up forcing some media professionals into self-censorship. This is particularly important given that already, the operations of two foreign media outlets (France 24 and RFI) have been suspended in the country.

The MFWA, therefore, calls on the authorities in Togo to release the three media professionals, as well as others in pre-trial detention, including Marguerite Essisonma Gnakadé, Gros Akpaou and Honore Honoré Sitsope Sokpor. Finally, we also urge them to reinstate the operations of the French media outlets, France 24 and RFI.

MFWA'S INTERVENTION IN TOGO

The above situational report is part of an intervention by the MFWA to contribute to creating an enabling environment for expression and participation in governance processes in Togo, and across West Africa at large. The monitoring and reporting of freedom of expression situation in Togo falls under an MFWA project titled, **Promoting Press Freedom and Women's Digital Rights in Togo.** The 12-month project is made possible with funding support from the Dutch Foreign Ministry through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana.

The project seeks to contribute to improving the freedom of expression (offline and online) environment in the country, strengthening the capacity of the media and improving the safety of journalists' conditions in the country to ensure that the media are able to play their watchdog role and serve as agents for improving the rule of law in Togo. The project is also targeted at empowering female journalists, activists and civil society actors on how to optimise online platforms for participation in public discourses and governance processes while staying safe.

As part of the project, the MFWA monitors and produces monthly reports on the press freedom, freedom of expression (including expression through protests), and safety of journalists' conditions in the country. The monthly reports serve as awareness creation and advocacy materials for drawing attention to the situation in the country, demanding redress, and advocating for policy and regulatory reforms.