Empowering Media and Voices for Public Good

Togo Watch

Key Freedom of Expression Developments in Togo

in September 2026



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[01]

KEY FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION DEVELOPMENTS IN TOGO IN SEPTEMBER 2026

As the project **Promoting Press Freedom and Women's Digital Rights in Togo** comes to an end, this September edition of **TOGO WATCH** marks the conclusion of a series of 13 monthly reports documenting the state of freedom of expression and press freedom in Togo from September 2025 to September 2026.

The final report records two major incidents. The first development concerns the provisional release of French filmmakers Gaël Mocaër and Sebastian Perez Pezzani, alongside their Togolese fixer, Fred Vedomey. The second is the attempted abduction of Roland Yaovi Kodjo, a reporter for Togo's private broadcaster, Tampa TV.



L-R: Sebastian Perez Pezzani, Gaël Mocaër and Fixer, Fred Vedomey | *Credit: Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)*

More than a month after their arrest on July 27, 2026, in northern Togo, French filmmakers Gaël Mocaër and Sebastian Perez Pezzani, along with their Togolese fixer Fred Vedomey, were granted provisional release on September 1, 2026. The three men were arrested while filming a documentary for France 5 in an area classified as restricted due to terrorist activity.

They were charged with making "false statements" over alleged irregularities in their work authorisations and filming permit application. The allegations were contested by the production team, which maintained that the necessary authorisations had been obtained. While Perez Pezzani had been placed under house arrest on August 20 for medical reasons, Mocaër and Vedomey remained in detention until their provisional release.

This development was made public by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on September 3, 2026. The release allowed the two French filmmakers to return to France. However, the case remains ongoing, and the three men have not been cleared of the charges against them.

The second incident is that of Roland Yaovi Kodjo, a reporter for Togo's private broadcaster Tampa TV. Roland was seized while covering a traditional festival in Bassar, a town in north-central Togo. Based on the information received from the Director of Tampa TV, Roland was approached by a man who pretended to want his photograph taken, and asked Roland: "Are you Tampa TV?" Roland answered in the affirmative, without suspecting anything.



Roland Yaovi Kodjo, reporter for Tampa TV

He followed the man carrying his equipment until they reached the stadium exit, before being handcuffed, blindfolded and forced into a vehicle by unidentified men who claimed to be angry at him for criticising their superiors in his reporting.

Shortly afterwards, one of the abductors, the driver, received a phone call during which he spoke in the Ife language, which is different from the Bassar language. This revealed a shared regional origin with his victim. Recognising the language, Roland did not hesitate to tell him: "You speak my language".

According to Francisco Napo Koura, Director of Tampa TV, the kidnappers seemed confused and abandoned Roland in a bushy area approximately 50 kilometres from where he was seized.

Speaking to the MFWA, Francisco, who is from Bassar, suspects that he was the target, which would explain why the kidnappers later released Roland.

Roland is said to have suffered psychological trauma and required psychological support following the ordeal.

[02]

MFWA'S POSITION AND CALL TO ACTION

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) welcomes the provisional release of the French filmmakers and their Togolese fixer, but remains deeply concerned about the attempted kidnapping of Tampa TV's reporter and the apparent targeting of journalists in connection with their work.

The MFWA condemns the attempted kidnapping incident, which constitutes a serious violation of press freedom and a grave attack on the safety and physical integrity of a journalist. It speaks volumes about the risks faced by media professionals in Togo and the need for stronger safeguards to ensure that journalists can carry out their duties without fear of intimidation, harassment or violence.

The MFWA calls on the Togolese authorities to investigate the incident, identify and bring those responsible to justice, and establish the circumstances surrounding the abduction. The authorities must also take appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of journalists and prevent similar incidents from occurring.

[03]

MFWA'S INTERVENTION IN TOGO

The brief report above on the freedom of expression situation in Togo during the month of September 2026 is part of the project, **Promoting Press Freedom and Women's Digital Rights in Togo,** which is being implemented with funding support from the Dutch Foreign Ministry through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana.

The 12-month project seeks to improve the freedom of expression (offline and online) environment in the country, strengthen the capacity of the media and ensure the safety of journalists in the country. Ultimately, the project is aimed at ensuring 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 discourse and governance processes while staying safe.

As part of the project, the MFWA monitors and produces monthly reports on press freedom, freedom of expression (including expression through protests), and safety of journalists 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.





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