

Deportation of human rights?

Investigative journalist fears to be send back to Cameroon

Charles Atangana's future is uncertain. A few weeks ago he opened the door and suddenly faced an arrest along with a prospected deportation to his homeland Cameroon. In his last court appearance at 07/10/2010 his case was adjourned. He now is on bail and has to stay in different hostels for immigrants in London. But the fear of a deportation is still undeniable. "For me going back to Cameroon is a death sentence", he said in an interview with The Herald.

Charles Atangana is a respected investigative journalist. He specialised on business journalism and exposed corruption within the government in Cameroon. This did not go by without consequences. Members of his family were arrested and tortured. When they eventually found Atangana he faced the same torture, being stripped, bullied and beaten. A sad reality for dissidents in a country with an extremely narrowed freedom of press.



Atangana hold a speech a few day before has been arrested

It was a life threatening situation for Atangana and he saw no other way then to leave the country. In 2004 he fled from Cameroon with a fake passport and he managed to get to Glasgow, where he was living for six years.

In Glasgow Charles Atangana integrated well to his new environment. He became a member of the National Union of Journalists(NUJ) and started to work as a volunteer for the Citizen Advice Bureau in Parkhead, in the East End. Both organisations appreciate the diificult situation he is facing and are now lobbying that he can stay in Britain, where he is safe.

The NUJ immediately intervened when they learned about his arrest. Paul Holleran of the NUJ branch in Glasgow explains: "I managed to send texts to him, telling we would fight to the nails to keep him in this country. We are campaigning, trying to keep him on a permanent basis."

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In fact the NUJ played a key role in his support and so far the efforts have been quite successful. First of all he is still in the country, now under improved bail conditions and his case is currently reviewed. The NUJ provided evidences and witnesses for the case, highlighting the serious danger for critical journalists, like Atangana, in Cameroon. The judges, who first were denying a life-threatening scenario, are now taking the new evidence into consideration. "The level of political support has been quite phenomenal," says Paul Holleran, "that means that they are looking at the case in more depth, than they probably would normally."

Unfortunately the case of Charles Atangana is not an exception in Cameroon. The current president, Paul Biya, is in charge since 28 years and he plans to stand for the next general election, which is due next year. The authorities are keen to keep the status quo, even with force, against any form of dissidence. The Federation of African Journalist reports that currently 13 prominent journalists are detained or had been attacked or threatened in Cameroon. In case of a deportation Atangana considers his arrest a certainty and fears he won't return from it, "Many before me have been detained and then they dissappear. Even today nobody knows what happened to them."

Paul Holleran recognises a strong responsibility of the British government in this case. Although he remains critical to the current events he maintains a positive outlook, "Hopefully Charles is going to be establishing a more robust process that can protect people who should not be send back to countries that could end up killing them."

The case already gained publicity and a deportation of Charles Atangana would certainly not go by unnoticed. It would rather cause an outcry of journalists and human rights organisations. It is not only a question of the value of the democracy and press freedom in Cameroon, but also of our own democracy, the British immigration policies and our values of human rights.