

South Sudanese journalists accused of taking bribes

Saturday 18 August 2012

August 17, 2012 (KAMPALA) – A number of reporters working for radio, newspapers and South Sudan TV have told the *Sudan Tribune* that they have witnessed colleagues taking payments in return for writing positive stories about particular businesses, or taking the news angle desired by some politicians.

Some journalists have demanded cash for transport or have dropped stories when they have not received payment. Corruption is one of the biggest problems facing the world's youngest nation.

An independent South Sudan media organisation based in Juba has condemned the practice of receiving cash for stories or bribes as "unethical".

David de Dau, the head of Agency for Independence Media (AIM), said that the allegations put to him by *Sudan Tribune* "disheartening for a country that is just beginning."

South Sudan became independent in July 2011 as part of a peace deal with Khartoum. However, the former rebels that now govern South Sudan have at times failed to live up to the values of they fought for, as noted in a recent letter from President Salva Kiir to senior officials asking them to return over \$4 billion funds stolen since 2005.

Allegations of journalists being paid to cover events has been widely talked about in South Sudan in recent months.

Manyang David, a reporter for *The Juba Post* newspaper and a stringer for the Voice of America South Sudan in Focus, told *Sudan Tribune* that he saw a reporter being paid in Juba to make sure that a story, about the Miss South Sudan contest helping an orphanage, was broadcast on South Sudan Television. David said that he was not paid as he didn't ask, adding that "journalism is not for sale."

Another reporter working for a local radio station in Juba says he witnessed the same scenario when the Kenyan Commercial Bank (KCB) took reporters to Lanya county, Central Equatoria state to launch a project funded by the bank.

"My colleague who worked for a newspaper asked [that I] demand money from the KCB", the reporter said. The reporter, who requested anonymity, added that the newspaper reporter said "it was our right" to get paid by the bank to cover their story.

The reporters who attended the event in Lanya did not ask for money and the newspaper declined to publish the story. A week later, the reporter alleged, KCB summoned the newspaper reporter to seek explanation on why the news was not published.

Sudan Tribune's efforts to reach KCB spokesperson for comment on Friday were futile.

The newspaper reporter said he was too busy to speak to *Sudan Tribune* on Friday but the anonymous radio reporter said that KCB offered 5,000 South Sudanese Pounds (SSP), approximately \$1,300, for the story about the Lanya County project in the next publication.

Reporters accused of indulging in this practice who have been contacted by *Sudan Tribune* either declined to respond or completely denied the allegation. But one student doing an internship at a media organisation in Juba admitted being bribed to cover a story in July. The reporter attributed accepting bribe to not receiving expenses from the media house.

"There is no transport, no lunch or any form of financial support," the reporter told *Sudan Tribune*.

Agency for Independent Media also claims that reporters accept bribe. The chairperson of AIM, David de Dau, says there is need to train local journalists to be more ethical and observe code of journalistic principles. Dau admits that funding is main factor.

"I think journalists need some capacity building in regards [...] as well as persuading their employers to raise their salaries," he said.

When government officials travel outside of the capital Juba for major events or political functions, they move with a large group of reporters from the main media houses in the country. Transport, lunch and coverage allowances are allegedly provided by the government putting the independence of the reporters in jeopardy.

Sudan Tribune was unable to reach a government official for comment on Friday.

South Sudan has few trained journalists. Less than 30% of the population are able to read and write, a legacy of decades of civil war that preceded a peace deal in 2005.

(ST)