

3.4 JOURNALISTS UNDER ATTACK

“At the station we know we are living between death and life.” Radio presenter, Kano⁷⁰

Boko Haram has targeted media houses in bomb attacks and has killed and threatened journalists.

Attacks on journalists, including murder, intimidation and threats, as well as the bombing of media houses, have undermined independent journalism, freedom of expression and consequently the free flow of information in Nigeria.

ATTACK OF THISDAY NEWSPAPER

On 26 April 2012, Boko Haram bombed the offices of the Nigerian newspaper *Thisday* in Abuja and a building housing three newspapers, including *Thisday*, in Kaduna. At least seven people died. Boko Haram claimed responsibility in an interview with the online newspaper *Premium Times*, saying “We have repeatedly cautioned reporters and media houses to be professional and objective in their reports. This is a war between us and the Government of Nigeria; unfortunately the media have not been objective and fair in their report of the ongoing war, they chose to take sides.” Boko Haram went on to list a number of allegedly incorrect reports about their activities or statements.⁷¹

On 1 May 2012, Boko Haram issued a further warning to 11 national and international media houses: “We will take revenge on them by God’s grace, some of these media houses have been categorized into three groups. The first group is the likes of *Thisday* whose offences are big. The second group we will also attack soon are *Punch*, *Daily Sun*, *Vanguard*, *Guardian*, *Nation*, *Tribune* and *National Accord*, which are all newspaper houses. There is also *Voice of America (VOA) Hausa radio*. All these media houses we will attack them including their staff and offices, by God’s grace. *VOA Hausa* for instance has recently started campaigning for people to support the government against us by exposing us. The next group that are on the verge of joining this list who if they are not careful we will attack very soon include *Leadership*, *Daily Trust*, *Peoples Daily* and *RFI (Radio France international)*.”⁷²

The threats and intimidation mean that journalists are increasingly unwilling or unable to report news stories about the security situation. Journalists told Amnesty International that the lack of access to a Boko Haram spokesperson meant they were unable to seek their official response.⁷³

Boko Haram has issued several threats publicly and directly to journalists, warning them to change their reporting or face attack. Several journalists interviewed by Amnesty International said they had received direct or indirect threats from Boko Haram following stories they had published or broadcast. One Kano based journalist told Amnesty International: “Once we ran a story that JTF arrested five Boko Haram and the next day my colleagues were telling me that Boko Haram called some of my colleagues warning us. One local station doesn’t cover anything concerning this issue because of that threat.”⁷⁴

On 22 October 2011, Zakariyya Isa, a cameraman with the Nigerian Television Authority was shot dead in front of his house in the Bulunkutu area of Maiduguri. Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the killing; Abul Qaqa, the group’s spokesperson, said he was killed for being an informant.⁷⁵