

STORIES OF THE DETRIMENTAL IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT-ORDERED INTERNET DISRUPTIONS ON THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

The number of internet shutdowns is dramatically increasing around the world, with **at least 39 countries** experiencing shutdowns since 2015. Just this year, Access Now has already recorded **65 internet shutdowns** with the [Shutdown Tracker Optimization Project](#), and the number is rising. In many cases, governments order shutdowns during elections, protests, and periods of social unrest, when accountability and access to information are most critical for affected populations. Yet network disruptions make it extremely difficult for journalists and media workers to cover events as they unfold, and to keep themselves safe in volatile environments.

Safe and adequate access to communication and information stands at the core of journalists' right to work, and government-ordered shutdowns can put journalists at great personal risk. Further, effective media coverage is essential to holding governments accountable for human rights abuses, and to ensuring populations have the information needed to meaningfully participate in their democratic processes.

In order to better document the deep personal impact individuals experience during internet shutdowns, Access Now initiated the [Shutdown Stories Project](#) as part of the work of the [#KeepItOn coalition](#). The following testimonies from journalists and media workers highlight how their work has been disrupted and their safety has been put at risk by internet shutdowns, and there are many others facing similar challenges around the world.

Frederic Takang
BBC News, Cameroon

I had to make a four-hour round trip to a neighbouring region every time I wanted to send radio reports to my editors.

Journalist
Kashmir, India

When our mobile connection was finally restored, we learned that eight people had been killed in the last few hours.

Arsène Tungali
Journalist, Democratic Republic of Congo

You cannot imagine how hard it was, not being able to have access to Internet and to some mobile services. I was sometimes obliged to cross the border to Rwanda to check my emails and to send out some tweets about the current situation.

Kingsley Fomunyuy Njoka
Journalist, Cameroon

As a journalist I have not been able to work for the whole time of the shutdown. I struggle to travel a long way to regions with internet, where I find myself now.

STORY 1



Emmanuel Agbenonwossi is a journalist from the small west African nation of Togo, living through repeated internet shutdowns mandated by the government to quell protests.

“The internet shutdown in Togo was a disruption to my work as a web reporter. I was unable to submit my articles to the international media, express myself online, or stay in touch with my relatives abroad. I had to stay in a big hotel in the capital to get internet access, and it was ten times more expensive than my personal connection. Sometimes I had to cross the border to have access to the mobile connection in order to communicate with my sources, my family and my relatives. This shutdown took away my freedom of expression and struck a blow to my finances.”

STORY 2



Sahrish Khokher is an assignment editor & senior TV reporter in Sindh, Pakistan. She told Access Now how a September 2017 internet shutdown affected her work at [ARY News Sukkur](#).

“Due to suspension of networks I faced so many difficulties in my professional side as I was totally disconnected with all my contacts.”

STORY 3



Jeannot is a 30-year-old journalist and lawyer who noticed the internet faltering when he arrived at work that same morning. He left early, but the connection was no better at home.

“I could not find enough information anymore as it was difficult for me to get in touch with many other people. At home, my anxiety kept growing, because no one really knew what was going on in the country. Moreover, I was only able to receive my paycheck on September 11 because without internet connection the ATMs did not work, and several banks accepted deposits but did not allow withdrawals.”

STORY 4



Cameroonian civil society organizations are adept at working creatively under difficult conditions, but the internet shutdown has hit them hard. **Paul-Joel Kamtchang** told us about the difficulties his team faces at [Data Cameroon](#), which fosters a free society by supporting journalism and open data.

“Our contacts in the Northwest and Southwest regions have not been able to monitor the situation on the ground or report the difficulties journalists are facing. It has been really painful and we are afraid of losing credibility with our partners and readers.”

More stories illustrating the harms experienced by journalists during internet shutdowns recently published by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

STORY 5

On 25 June 2017, Congo-Brazzaville's internet connection was **restored** after a **15-day shutdown** that was reportedly caused by a **mysterious fishing boat** that damaged the country's submarine cables.

While journalists and analysts inside and outside of Congo-Brazzaville **speculated** over the truthfulness of a boat's involvement, private mobile companies were able to provide some satellite connection. Nevertheless, journalists remained hampered.

"As long as the internet is not stable, many field, remote reporters or correspondents are facing big problems to send their stories, their work," a Congo-Brazzaville-based journalist told CPJ on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

While online media distributors are effectively blocked from their platforms during internet shutdowns, print and broadcast journalists' investigative capacities also suffer greatly.

Cited from Jonathan Rozen, **Journalists under duress: Internet shutdowns in Africa are stifling press freedom**, The Africa Portal.

STORY 6

Between 30 May and 8 June, the Ethiopian **government shut down** the country's internet service for the **third time in the last year**. These shutdowns have occurred in the context of an ongoing crackdown on the press by authorities, who are currently keeping nine of the 17 journalists recorded on the Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) 2016 **prison census** behind bars.

Since the state-run Ethio Telecom holds **monopolistic control** over both internet and telephone service, the government has the ability to effectively sever its population's communications on a whim.

"We've been through extraordinarily difficult times [during] the ten days of [the] shutdown," Tsedale Lemma, editor-in-chief of the Addis Standard, told CPJ over WhatsApp.

Cited from Jonathan Rozen, **Journalists under duress: Internet shutdowns in Africa are stifling press freedom**, The Africa Portal.

#KeepItOn

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The #KeepitOn campaign, convened by Access Now, consists of **142 organizations** from **60 countries** that are devoted to fighting internet shutdowns as of November 2017. Since the campaign launched at RightsCon Silicon Valley in 2016, we've seen major victories: the **UN Human Rights Council condemned internet shutdowns**; **30 governments of the Freedom Online Coalition spoke out against shutdowns**, as well as the **GSMA, the Global Network Initiative**, and the **African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights**. And, together with local activists, we helped end major internet shutdowns in Cameroon and Gambia.

For Access Now's Shutdown Tracker Optimization Project, see <https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton-shutdown-tracker/>

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