

Journalists in Kenya protest attacks on media freedoms

AFP- Dozens of journalists joined marches in Kenya on Wednesday in protest at what they see as heavy-handed government tactics to stifle media freedoms, including police attacks on journalists during the demonstrations that have rocked the country for the past five weeks.

The journalists – many wearing white – held placards reading “Journalists lives matter”, “Shoot not the messenger” and “End the brutality” as they staged rallies across several towns and cities.

The protests were organised in the wake of attacks on journalists covering the anti-government demonstrations, among other grievances.

Launched last month by young Gen-Z Kenyans over tax increases, the rallies have spiralled into deadly violence and morphed into wider anger against President William Ruto’s government.

At least 50 people have been killed and more than 400 wounded since the start of the protests on June 18, according to rights groups.

Journalists covering the events have been shot at, tear-gassed and hit with batons and water cannon, media groups say, further eroding trust in the East African nation’s security forces.

“Freedom of the media and freedom of expression generally is on the verge of being eroded, courtesy of a rogue security apparatus,” the Kenya Editors Guild said in a statement last week.

On Wednesday, journalists in the capital Nairobi presented a

petition to the police headquarters before marching to parliament.

“We are asking for protection from the police and for them to stop shooting and attacking journalists with a lot of excessive force,” said the secretary general of the Kenya Union of Journalists, Erick Oduor.

– ‘Full-blown conflict’ –

State-funded regulator the Media Council of Kenya said it was “deeply concerned” about the deterioration of the relationship between the media and the government.

“What started as a perception about biased media coverage of the 2022 general election has now escalated into full blown conflict pitting the government against the media; resulting in unwarranted threats, blame games, coercion, intimidating and bad blood,” it said in a statement on Monday.

Kenya – an East African economic powerhouse – has long stood as an oasis of democracy in a volatile region.

Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders, known by its French acronym RSF, ranks Kenya 102nd out of 180 countries on its global list of press freedom, saying “investigations into abuses committed against journalists rarely result in convictions”.

Kenyan police are often accused by rights groups of using excessive force and carrying out unlawful killings, especially in poor neighbourhoods.

A Kenyan court this month found police acted unlawfully over the October 2022 killing of Pakistani journalist Arshad Sharif in a town south of Nairobi.

Sharif, a strident critic of Pakistan’s powerful military establishment and a supporter of former premier Imran Khan, was shot in the head when Kenyan police opened fire on his

car.

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