



PRESS RELEASE

**Landmark Judgment: ECOWAS Court finds Togo Violated FoE
with Internet Shutdown**

Today the ECOWAS Court handed down an important decision for freedom of expression, digital rights, and press freedom, finding that Togo, by shutting down the Internet in 2017, violated the rights of the plaintiffs - seven Togolese NGOs and a journalist. The Court awarded damages to the plaintiffs, and ordered Togo to put in place a legal framework protecting freedom of expression that is consistent with international human rights law standards. The Court also ordered Togo not to shut the Internet down again.

Media Defence and Amnesty International represented the plaintiffs, who challenged the decision of the Togolese government to shut down the Internet for days at a time on two occasions in 2017. The shutdowns took place while protestors were calling for constitutional reforms. As well as shutting down the Internet, the state authorities responded using unnecessary and excessive force against the protests with the security forces firing live ammunition and using tear gas against protesters and bystanders. The plaintiffs set out in detail the severe and multi-varied impact the shutdown had on them including that they were unable to report on the protests in order to let people know what was happening. Internet shutdowns have become an increasingly popular method of suppressing dissent and containing protests, and this judgment represents an important step in pushing back against this phenomenon.

"This judgment should act as a warning to other governments considering using Internet shutdowns as a tool to silence dissent. Importantly, the Court has ruled not only that the shutdown was illegal, but that it should not be repeated"

Padraig Hughes, Legal Director

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For press enquiries please contact:

jasmine.nehme@mediadefence.org / +44 7470 593 831

About Media Defence:

Media Defence is a UK-based charity that believes a free press is essential for democracy and holding power to account. We work to support journalists, bloggers and independent media who are under threat for their reporting. We do this through providing legal defence, grants, training and networking programmes for journalists, lawyers and press freedom organisations around the globe. We also take on high-level strategic cases to uphold freedom of expression laws worldwide.