

15 September 2020

Togo: Human rights defender Ferdinand Ayité on trial

On 16 September 2020, the second hearing of **Ferdinand Ayité** is due to take place at the Court of First Instance of Lomé. Ferdinand Ayité and the newspaper he works for, L'Alternative, are facing charges of defamation.

Ferdinand Ayité is an investigative journalist and human rights defender based in Lomé, Togo. He is the publication director of the investigative newspaper L'Alternative. L'Alternative is known for reporting on cases of corruption and embezzlement in Togo, calling for increased accountability in the country.

On 16 September 2020, the Court of First Instance of Lomé will conduct the second hearing in a defamation case filed against Ferdinand Ayité. The charge, filed by businessman Fabrice Affatsawo Adjakly, relates to an article published on 9 June 2020 in L'Alternative, uncovering a case of misappropriation of funds of between 400 and 500 billion CFA francs (610 to 760 million euros), related to the import of petroleum products. The article written by Ferdinand Ayité accuses Fabrice Affatsawo Adjakly, a businessman and member of the Committee for Monitoring Fluctuations in the Price of Petroleum Products (CSFPP), and his father Francis Sossah Adjakly of leading the embezzlement scandal, which also reportedly implicates members of the Togolese Government. Following the publication of the article, the human rights defender participated in several media interviews bringing public attention to the case. The first hearing took place on 19 August 2020 at the Court of First Instance of Lomé

Under Togo's revised Criminal Code of 2015, Ferdinand Ayité could face up to four years in prison if found guilty of defamation. In its 2016 UN Universal Periodic Review, Togo rejected recommendations to amend or repeal its defamation laws, which it has repeatedly used to crack down on human rights defenders and journalists

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the charges against human rights defender Ferdinand Ayité and the newspaper L'Alternative. Front Line Defenders believes that they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate work in defence of human rights and their exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Togo to:

1. Drop the case against Ferdinand Ayité and L'Alternative as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Togo are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.