

Kenya using advertising clout to stifle criticism?

The Kenyan government has ordered the state sector to withdraw advertising from Standard Group media outlets; top employees interrogated after critical report.

Reporters Without Borders has condemned a government decision to withhold state advertising from the Standard Group media, which include *The Standard* daily newspaper and Kenya Television Network (KTN).

"The culmination of a war of words in which the police and courts have at times been enlisted, this decision is absurd and dangerous," the press freedom organisation said. "A state advertising boycott is not just a low blow, it is also unacceptable inasmuch as public funds should not be used for political or personal advantage. This boycott is just aggravating the climate of tension between the government and the Standard Group and will fuel mistrust."

Several Kenyan and foreign media reported that the public services ministry circulated an e-mail message at the start of April 2007 instructing public sector groups to cancel any advertising they were placing with *The Standard* or KTN, or to redirect it to other media outlets more favourable to government policy.

The move came after a year of tension between President Mwai Kibaki's government and the Standard Group. After the e-mail message's content was revealed, the security minister said *The Standard* had "declared a war" against him.

The newspaper recently published a report claiming that a government minister had approached Armenian organised crime members with a view to having former President Daniel arap Moi's son murdered. After the article appeared, the newspaper's managing director Chaacha Mwita, along with Standard Group deputy chairman Paul Melly, operations director Paul Wanyagah and editorial director Kwendo Opanga, were interrogated for seven hours on 17 April without being able to consult with their lawyers.

Just over a year ago, on 2 March 2006, the police carried out simultaneous raids on the headquarters of KTN and *The Standard's* printers in Nairobi's industrial area. Armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles, the police attacked guards at KTN and damaged equipment, causing panic in the studios and forcing the station to suspend broadcasting until the afternoon of the next day. The police also seized the copies of that day's issue of *The Standard* and burned them.

By courtesy of [Reporters Without Borders](#)