



Dear Mélinda, dear Hanène, dear Leïla, dear David, Mr Dréanic,

We are shocked by the role CFI has played in the harassment and the sentencing of our esteemed colleague Ignace Sossou, Beninese journalist¹: instead of supporting him, CFI directly contributed to his imprisonment with a letter addressed to the Minister of Justice and Legislation of Benin.²

This letter, which can only be described as shameful, was a true act of betrayal. Such actions are contrary to the principles of ethics and integrity that we defend. Under these circumstances, we can no longer be partners of CFI and we have no choice but to withdraw with immediate effect from the MédiaLab Investigation project, where we were to train and coach eight journalists on their investigations in the field of health and medicine. We regret for the mentees that we would have loved to support in their work, continuing the excellent collaboration with Mélinda Trochu, Hanène Zbiss, Leïla Miñano and David Hivet.

CFI started over justifying itself by arguing that the letter “was only intended for the Ministry in order to protect our media partner who had invited the prosecutor to the event and to avoid an escalation of the situation ...”³ and continues today to clear its responsibility by writing in a press release of CFI “being outraged to have been instrumentalized”,⁴ pointing at a “awkward formulation of a letter whose purpose has been misguided”⁵. How can you seriously advance the argument that the problem lies in the fact that this letter “was only for the ministry” and should not have been used in court or made public? The bottom line is that this letter should never have been written or sent to any government. CFI cannot simply deplore an “internal dysfunction”,⁶ when the organization has just demonstrated that it was ready to let condemn a fellow journalist to 18 months in prison for three tweets linked to a CFI initiative,⁷ without flinching for two weeks.⁸

On January 10, Mélinda Trochu wrote us that CFI Africa deputy director Cléa Kahn Sribier and CFI Africa director Pierre Jalladeau were “the subject of disciplinary proceedings”.⁹ We conclude that these two people are still part of your organization and we are astonished because, in our view, their retention within CFI is completely at odds with the values the organization claims to defend.

It is incomprehensible that CFI did not communicate from the start in a proactive and open manner, by adopting a firm position, one that leaves no doubt in the minds of journalists and governments that the organization is committed to the defense of press freedom and human rights. We find nothing about this in the few actions undertaken by CFI in the context of this extremely serious matter.

The damage inflicted on CFI's reputation is enormous, but that does not weigh much against what Ignace Sossou endures in prison. As CFI unfortunately contributed decisively to his nightmare, it is the organization that bears now the responsibility to fix without any further delay this injustice.

CFI must make every effort to obtain the immediate release and rehabilitation of Ignace Sossou, including activating its contacts with the French government so that it intervenes with the Beninese authorities, through diplomatic channels if necessary.

The journalist community urgently needs answers from you.

Best wishes,

Serena Tinari and Catherine Riva, Re-Check.ch

¹ <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/877926/societe/tribune-condamnation-du-journaliste-ignace-sossou-au-benin-fake-news-mutisme-et-coup-de-massue/>

² <http://www.lameteo.info/2019/12/27/benin-affaire-ignace-sossou-cfi-collabore-t-il-avec-des-journalistes-peu-scrupuleux/>

³ <https://beninwebtv.com/2019/12/ignace-sossou-vs-mario-metonou-cfi-lethique-du-cynisme-et-de-la-trahison/>

⁴ <https://www.cfi.fr/fr/actualites/cfi-demande-la-liberation-dans-les-plus-brefs-delais-du-journaliste-beninois-ignace>

⁵ <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20200107-condamnation-ignace-sossou-benin-cfi-mis-cause-ong>

⁶ <https://www.cfi.fr/fr/actualites/cfi-demande-la-liberation-dans-les-plus-brefs-delais-du-journaliste-beninois-ignace>

⁷ <http://reseau3i.info/2020/01/09/benin-les-preuves-de-la-bonne-foi-du-journaliste-ignace-sossou/>

⁸ <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/877926/societe/tribune-condamnation-du-journaliste-ignace-sossou-au-benin-fake-news-mutisme-et-coup-de-massue/>

⁹ Email sent by Mélinda Trochu on 10 January 2020