

Christian Radio Station Looted During Fatal Central African Republic Coup

Reports following last week's coup in the Central African Republic reveal that looting and vandalism at an HCJB Global partner radio station were much more extensive than first thought. Station equipment destroyed and stolen by looters during days of nationwide chaos is valued at nearly \$300,000. The radio station is off the air indefinitely.

The son of one station employee died from wounds inflicted in crossfire during the ensuing disorder near the base camp of Integrated Community Development International (ICDI), HCJB Global's partner that operates the station. Among many casualties in bloody riots, this victim of open fighting across the country leaves behind a wife and children.

"We mourn with this family who has suffered bitter grief," said Wayne Pederson, president and CEO of HCJB Global. "Our hearts are with the entire station staff, who is traumatized by the situation nationwide."

The ministry's total losses include well-drilling equipment, broadcast equipment, six vehicles and other property stolen from ransacked ICDI facilities.

The homes of four staff families were also looted. A staff member's son abducted by rebels on Easter Sunday escaped and is now safely home.

The coup began March 24 when about 5,000 Seleka rebel fighters poured into the capital city of Bangui, ousting President François Bozizé and setting up their own self-proclaimed president.

As rebel leaders struggle to solidify their grip on the government, the coup is being internationally condemned. The Red Cross reports at least 78 bodies were found, and 13 South African forces were killed. Defending troops expressed their horror at discovering they had been shooting at child and young teen soldiers, allegedly conscripted by the rebels in their bloody coup.

Among many pieces of equipment essential for broadcasting, the station's sound board, computers and microphones are gone. Without replacements, the station is silent from the airwaves.

"Pray for the station's team members, who have lost a life and much more than equipment. They need God's peace in this time of great crisis to feel secure and His comfort to enable them to function normally again," said Pederson. "In the midst of this chaos, the entire population needs to hear broadcasts of the message of hope that only God can bring to this nation."