



VANUATU: Media industry protests over ban on coverage of no-confidence motion



Senior journalist Len Garae ... critical of Speaker's ban on reporting no-confidence motion. Photo: Vanuatu Daily Post

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Marie M'Balla-Ndi

PORT VILA: Vanuatu's journalists have stepped up their protest over an unprecedented barring of them from reporting on a no-confidence motion which ousted former Prime Minister Edward Natapei last week.

The protest comes as Natapei has unveiled plans to stage a counter motion in a bid to unseat the new Prime Minister, Sato Kilman.

"It has never happened before," said Len Garae, senior journalist at the *Vanuatu Daily Post*.

"It is the first time in Vanuatu that the media and the public have been refused the right to follow the deliberations of a no-confidence motion and the election of a Prime Minister," Garae said.

During the no-confidence debate last Thursday, journalists were turned away from Parliament House by security officers who acted on instructions received from then parliamentary Speaker George Wells.

Wells is now Foreign Minister in the new cabinet.

"At first we were really shocked that George Wells banned us all," said another local journalist, who declined to be named.

"Looking back – and now that he is Foreign Minister – there is no doubt that there was a conflict of interest behind this ban," he said.

Vanuatu Daily Post editor Kiery Manasah said the ban was unexpected and unjustified, and the media had decided to show their discontent.

"The ban is unprecedented and totally uncalled for, especially from someone who likes to promote himself as a believer and supporter of principles of transparency and accuracy. "There is currently discussion among ourselves as to how we will show our disapproval of the ban, especially to former Speaker George Wells.

"There is talk among media colleagues to picket outside the Parliament but it is still early to say where this will lead us," said Manasah.

The editor of the newly relaunched *Wikli Post Bislama*, Ricky Bihini, has decided to give Wells a ban on anything that could promote his interests – including pictures of George Wells or anything that concerns him – on his paper until the 2012 elections.

Radio New Zealand International's Hilaire Bule reports Natapei now has plans to stage a motion of no-confidence against Kilman, his former deputy, after 31 of the country's 52 MPs voted against him.



About the authors



Marie M'Balla-Ndi
Doctoral candidate

Marie M'Balla-Ndi is a PhD candidate in journalism at the University of Queensland, and a Brisbane-based correspondent for the Francophone daily newspaper *Les Nouvelles Caledoniennes* in Nouméa, New Caledonia.



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Marie M'Balla-Ndi is a postgraduate journalism student at the University of Queensland.