**Artists and human rights defenders targeted in Burkina Faso**

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**Arterial Network**

http://www.arterialnetwork.org/article/artists\_bukina\_faso

With elections due in October, Burkina Faso awoke on Wednesday 16 September to a coup by members of the RSP military forces, otherwise known as the “Presidential Guard”, and led by former president Blaise Compaore's chief-of-staff, Gen. Gilbert Diendere.

A notable feature of the coup is that artists and human rights defenders have come under threat according to an Amnesty International Burkina Faso official and independent reports. A recording studio burnt down following Presidential Guard rocketfire in Oaugadougou on the first day of the coup.  The attack on the Abazon recording studio follows police harrassment and damage to property at the home of popular rapper Smockey the same day. Smockey, owner of the Abazon studio, and prominent leader in the Balai Citoyene movement, was threatened and warned to cease his outspoken activism. Other artists have gone into hiding following reports that they were being sought by the RSP.

There is speculation that the targeting of artists is a response to the active role artists played in the Balai Citoyen movement, a largely youth-based organisation who in 2014 vigorously opposed President Blaise Compaore’s attempts to manipulate the constitution in order to run for a 3rd term of office. Public demonstrations and the torching of Parliament buildings culminated with Compaore fleeing the country to Ivory Coast, when he remains in exile.

Earlier this year, the Abazon studio was the location for the recording of the Right to Life song by eleven leading musicians from eight African countries. This recording was part of the Artwatch Africa Ambassadors project of the pan-African arts organization Arterial Network, and aimed at raising awareness about artist rights and creative expression. Ironically, today marks the Nigerian launch of the song at the legendary Freedom Park in Lagos as part of the Afropolitan Vibes concert, and featuring two of the Artwatch Africa Ambassador participants, Ade Bantu and Didier Awadi.