

BY KARIM MUYOBO

KAMPALA. The government has defended ejecting three French journalists who had arrived to cover Uganda's ongoing general election, insisting the action did not violate any press freedom.

Last week, journalist Bastien Renouil, the East Africa correspondent for France 24, and two others from Radio France Internationale (RFI), were expelled despite having entered Uganda with the documentation required to carry out their work.

One of the other two journalists working for RFI was denied entry at the bor-

Govt speaks out on deported journalists

BACKGROUND

der, while the other, initially allowed into the country, was later escorted onto a return flight. Mr Renouil, who arrived on January 17, the day President Museveni was declared winner of the presidential election held two days earlier, was denied the opportunity to report.

But Dr Chris Baryomunsi, the minister for ICT, Information and National Guidance, said: "Accreditation is a simple and standard process. Uganda is open to journalists who comply with its laws.

The deportations were administrative in nature... Members of the press were accredited to cover events in the country, including the elections. If there were issues regarding certain media houses; that does not mean there is no press freedom in Uganda."

But Reporters Without Borders (RSF), an international body for journalists, said the French journalists were asked to complete a form normally reserved for "suspects," apologising for alleged-

ly failing to apply for the correct permit. After briefly returning to their hotel to book air tickets, the journalists retrieved their passports from immigration officials and were escorted to Entebbe Airport, and departed on January 20.

Human rights defender Dr Livingstone Ssewanyana condemned the deportations, saying: "We should condemn actions that limit media space, particularly deportations. They speak volumes about our democratic credentials. We are part of the global village, and international partners require information that international journalists help to provide."