

Issue 13: May-July 2008

IFEX Advocacy Action News

A bi-monthly bulletin for IFEX members to promote campaigns and share advocacy information

IN THIS ISSUE:

[FOCUS ON MEMBER ADVOCACY](#)

[page 1](#)

[CAMPAIGNS AND ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS](#)

[page 2](#)

[RAPID AND ORGANISED ACTION RESPONSE \(ROAR\)](#)

[page 3](#)

[TOPICS AND TOOLS](#)

[page 4](#)

FOCUS ON MEMBER ADVOCACY

Sri Lanka: Joint Action by IFEX Members Incites Government Action

By Sam Burton, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression/IFEX Clearing House Intern

Sri Lanka has long been considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world for practising journalists. In early 2008 this already perilous situation escalated, with the media suffering increasing cases of intimidation – by the government itself. Commentaries published on 5 June on the Defence Ministry website called journalists critical of government action "enemies of the state" and specifically criticised IFEX member Free Media Movement (FMM). This climate was further pronounced by almost weekly violent incidents against the media.

In May, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and more than 45 international organisations responded to the situation by launching the campaign, "Stop the War on Journalists in Sri Lanka". The campaign calls for the government of Sri Lanka to honour the constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of expression by protecting and supporting its journalists. It culminated in a joint letter written by IFJ and the International News Safety Institute, which was signed by 29 IFEX members and sent to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon on 20 June.

The letter said that the Sri Lankan authorities "risk encouraging those who have used extreme violence against journalists and other news professionals." The signatories condemned recent violence against the media within the country, and urged Ban to "persuad[e] the government of Sri Lanka to...immediately stop all actions which undermine the independence and safety of the news community."

The Sri Lankan government responded directly to the joint action almost immediately. On 25 June, a presidential sub-committee of cabinet ministers was appointed to look into media grievances, namely allegations that local journalists trying to cover the country's civil war have been threatened and harassed. IFJ views this development as "a positive step in opening a dialogue to resolving the dangers journalists face in Sri Lanka," but "this view is expressed with caution."

Caution seems apt in this case: shortly after the committee was formed, a state-controlled Sinhala newspaper published allegations that the Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) sent Tamil tigers masquerading as journalists for training in Denmark and Norway. In the wake of this accusation, the deputy head of SLPI Namal Perera and British diplomatic employee Mahendra Amaraweera were brutally assaulted in a kidnapping attempt on 30 June. FMM expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of the committee given the attack, stating that members need "to prove their commitment by resolving killings and assaults."

Since then, there have been no public statements issued by the sub-committee to indicate that it has taken any action. FMM reports that although "all committee members except one visited the hospital within three hours of the attack...threats against SLPI [are] continuing."

Despite this, ensuring the success of the sub-governmental committee remains the primary objective for both local and international organisations. With this goal in mind, IFJ and several other press freedom and human rights organisations are currently planning a series of advocacy actions and a return international mission to Sri Lanka in the second half of 2008.

Visit these links:

IFJ – [Stop the War on Journalists in Sri Lanka, says World Press Freedom Community](#)

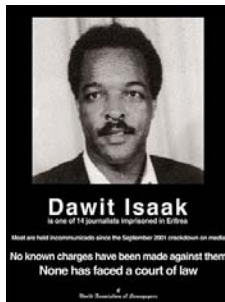
IFEX – [JOINT ACTION: Twenty-nine IFEX members alert UN secretary-general to statements by government and military that "put journalists in grave danger"](#)

EJC – [Sri Lanka to investigate claims of threats to media](#)

CAMPAIGNS and ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS

[Gambia – ECOWAS court order a victory for Gambia campaign](#)

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) recently achieved a major success in its efforts to have the Gambian government release journalist Chief Ebrima Manneh, who has been detained since his arrest on 7 July 2006. In June 2007, MFWA filed a suit on behalf of Manneh before the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Nigeria. In a landmark decision on 5 June 2008, the court found Manneh's arrest and detention to be illegal, and ordered that he be released. But the Gambian government refuses to acknowledge detaining Manneh and would not send any representatives to appear before the court. MFWA is asking both ECOWAS and international free expression organisations to put pressure on President Yahya Jammeh to ensure that the government respects and enforces the orders of the court by releasing Manneh unconditionally.



World Association of Newspapers (WAN) campaigns for imprisoned Eritrean journalists

WAN has stepped up the pressure on the Eritrean government to release imprisoned journalists with an advertisement campaign featuring the face of Dawit Isaak, one of 14 Eritrean journalists who has spent seven years in prison despite never being formally charged. WAN is encouraging newspapers worldwide to publish the free advertisement. To receive a high resolution ad, contact Alexandra Waldhorn at: awaldhorn@wan.asso.fr

[Zimbabwe – Mission examines state of free expression](#)

In the wake of arrests of journalists, both local and foreign, and a deteriorating freedom of expression environment prior to Presidential elections at the end of June, a fact-finding mission including Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and Network of African Freedom of Expression Organisations (NAFEO) visited Zimbabwe to investigate and raise awareness of the situation. Concluding the Zimbabwean media and freedom of expression environment to be "severely constrained", the mission provided in-depth analysis of various aspects of free expression and recommended increased regional and international monitoring.

[Tunisia – IFEX Tunisia Monitoring Group \(IFEX-TMG\) advocacy pays off in case of Slim Boukhdhir](#)

Following intense lobbying and campaigning by IFEX-TMG, Slim Boukhdhir was freed on 21 July - four months before the end of his sentence. According to RSF, the journalist thanked the international community for its part in securing his release. IFEX-TMG members were keeping the heat on Tunisia at a UN Human Rights Council session in June 2008. International PEN, International Publishers Association (IPA) and WAN presented a report regarding severe breaches of Article 19. Later in June, PEN and IPA lobbied the European Parliament (EP) Human Rights Subcommittee in Brussels around "the suppression of free expression in Tunisia" and explored how the Parliament could work with local and international NGOs to improve the situation. [Click here](#) for more details.

[Egypt – Egyptian Members Campaign for Editors' Freedom](#)

The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) and the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) have been campaigning with other rights groups to overturn the jail sentences imposed on four editors, including Ibrahim Issa who was recently sentenced to six months in prison. The groups garnered significant media attention for the cause at a joint advocacy event ahead of Issa's trial hearing in May. Forty-four organisations worldwide have signed on to a joint appeal for the editors' release.

[Mexico – members advocate against authorities' use of "excessive discretion" in radio licensing](#)

IFEX members ARTICLE 19 – Mexico, the National Center for Social Communication (CENCOS) and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) have lashed out against the Mexican authorities for "criminalising" non-profit radio broadcasting after 100 armed police raided community radio station Tierra y Libertad in June. The groups are advocating for government recognition of the sector; an end to the forced closure of community broadcasters without following due process; and the establishment of an appropriate regulatory framework.

[Belarus – International organisations urge government to withdraw "repressive" mass media law](#)

Eight international rights organisations, including IFEX members Norwegian PEN, ARTICLE 19, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Index on Censorship, have officially appealed to the President of Belarus not to sign a new media law they claim will "make even more restrictive what is already an unduly harsh regulatory regime for the media." The bill was passed by the upper house in June and now requires only the signature of the President to be passed into law.

RAPID AND ORGANISED ACTION RESPONSE (ROAR)

Rapid and Organised Action Response (ROAR) is part of the IFEX Campaigns Programme strategy to support fast, short-term follow-up actions on free expression violations. Write to: campaigns@ifex.org if your organisation would like more information, or see: <http://campaigns.ifex.org/en/about.html>

INTERNAL APPEALS:

[Yemen – Free expression violations mounting as jailed journalist receives Amnesty award](#)

On 17 June, Amnesty International UK presented Abdulkarim al-Khaiwani, former editor of Yemen's political weekly newspaper "Al-Shora," with the 2008 Special Award for Human Rights Journalism Under Threat. Only one week prior, al-Khaiwani was sentenced to six years in jail for carrying out his professional work as a journalist. ARTICLE 19 reports that Yemeni authorities have denied al-Khaiwani the ability to appeal. The organisation is currently coordinating an internal appeal on the free expression situation in the country through IFEX for joint action – watch for it in your inbox and please sign on.

[Vietnam – Petition for release of human rights lawyers held for past 16 months](#)

RSF condemns the continuing detention of human rights lawyers and cyber-dissidents Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan, and urges Internet users to sign a petition for their release. Arrested in Hanoi on 6 March 2007, they were sentenced to jail terms of four and three years respectively for "hostile propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam." [Sign the petition.](#)

Your signature is needed – look out for internal appeals and sign on!

JOINT ACTIONS:

[International \(Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations\)](#): At a June meeting in Belgrade, Serbia, the Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations, including five IFEX members and two organisations, passed resolutions on press freedom issues, including on Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and on the trend of curtailing speech in the name of protecting religions and religious values.

[Uganda \(Media Foundation for West Africa\)](#): Eight IFEX members and other members of the Network of African Freedom of Expression Organisations called on the Ugandan President to respect press freedom.

[Saudi Arabia \(Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies\)](#): Thirty-one organisations, including four IFEX members, appealed for the release of three activists detained for speaking out about constitutional reform.

[Mexico \(World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters\)](#): Six IFEX members protested a member of a free expression mission being called an "enemy of the state" by a government official.

[Burma \(Southeast Asian Press Alliance\)](#): Twenty-two organisations comprising the Burma Action Group called for the Burmese junta to conduct a transparent and participatory referendum on 10 May 2008 and to stop violating the rights of referendum campaigners to vote "No".

[China \(Hong Kong Journalists' Association \(HKJA\), International Federation of Journalists \(IFJ\)\)](#): IFJ and HKJA launched an online petition campaign demanding the release of Chinese journalist Hu Jia. In April, Hu was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in jail and one year's denial of political rights for "inciting subversion of state power".

[Nepal \(Federation of Nepali Journalists \(FNJ\)\)](#): FNJ and the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal called the world's attention to the frequent violations of media freedom and freedom of expression during the national elections campaigning period.

[Click here for a complete list of IFEX joint actions](#)

TOPICS and TOOLS

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

A New Jersey mom's fight for free expression in Yemen

Jane Novack, a 46-year-old stay-at-home mom from New Jersey, has become an activist figurehead in the fight for freedom of expression in Yemen. Through her blog "Armies of Liberation", Novack has successfully attracted international attention for the case of detained Yemeni journalist Abdulkarim Al-Khaiwani. "Some say there's no progress in the Middle East," she said. "But if they could just see these people – they're really modern heroes."

[Novack's blog: "Armies of Liberation"](#)

The New York Times: ["A Living Room Crusade"](#)

International Herald Tribune: ["A Living-Room Crusade via Blogging"](#)

ADVOCACY TOOLS

[Advocacy expert series: media guide](#) (Pact Tanzania)

A guide for enabling Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and interested individuals to partner with the media and give greater visibility to their work being carried out at the community level. The guide provides knowledge and skills for engaging with the media to promote projects and information sharing, including insights into how CSOs can benefit from the diversity of the media and the advantages of collaboration.

[Advocacy tools and guidelines: promoting policy change](#) (CARE International)

Develop the most appropriate strategies to influence policy decision-makers and incorporate advocacy into projects in order to tackle the root causes of problems faced by communities. This manual is a training guide that outlines key advocacy concepts and techniques.

"Breaking the Torture Machine" ("Briser l'engrenage de la torture")

This film, produced by Tunisian NGO National Council for Liberties in Tunisia (CNLT), is part of the organisation's advocacy work to expose torture in Tunisian jails. Available in English, French and Arabic, "Breaking the Torture Machine" was filmed clandestinely in Tunisia. For a copy, contact: [Sihem Bensedrine](#) of CNLT

CALL TO IFEX MEMBERS

- **Want to start a campaign and need advice or support?**
- **Tell us about your organisation's campaigns and advocacy efforts**
- **Share articles, websites and campaigns tools**

Contact the IFEX campaigns programme at: campaigns@ifex.org or see: <http://campaigns.ifex.org/en/index.html>