

Issue 15: October-December 2008

IFEX Advocacy Action News

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

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FOCUS ON MEMBER ADVOCACY

IFEX members take action to protect journalists against violence in Mexico

Under the slogan "*What you don't know can hurt you*", ARTICLE 19 and the National Center for Social Communication (CENCOS) have launched the Permanent Campaign to Protect Journalists in Mexico on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A culture of impunity prevails in Mexico, where journalists are threatened, abducted, assaulted and even murdered for publishing critical information. These violations, increasing in number, not only restrict the freedom of expression of those who practise the profession but also the right of a society as a whole to be informed.

Through the campaign, ARTICLE 19 and CENCOS hope to draw attention to the country's dangerous environment for the media by closely monitoring free expression violations, and supporting journalists, media owners and directors in achieving the level of safety needed to truly exercise press freedom. They are also reaching out to other active IFEX members and groups in the region who are interested in creating a nationwide journalist safety network.

"What you don't know can hurt you" also boasts the support of high-profile press freedom advocates. Guests at the launch included Lydia Cacho, a Mexican reporter who has been the target of death threats, sabotage, defamation suits and police harassment because of her work uncovering prostitution and child pornography networks, and Rosa Isela Caballero, the wife of journalist José Antonio García Apac. García disappeared two years ago in Michoacán.

To support organisations in effective human rights monitoring, ARTICLE 19 and CENCOS published three resources – a guidebook on freedom of expression Mexico, a protocol around reporting and documentation, and an analysis drawing from a recent international seminar on the methodology of monitoring violations against journalists. All of this is available on the recently launched campaign website: www.libertad-expresion.org.mx

ARTICLE 19 and CENCOS hope that the campaign will serve as a model for future advocacy initiatives in other countries in the region facing similar circumstances.

Other IFEX members in Mexico have also focused their efforts in safeguarding journalists. The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), the Center for Journalism and Public Ethics (CEPET) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as well as several other national organisations have been active monitors and advocates during the deepening crisis in Mexico.

AMARC Mexico maintains frequent communication with prominent intergovernmental and transnational human rights bodies to ensure concrete steps are taken towards protecting community radio stations, which have been particularly vulnerable to the increasing aggressions and attacks.

CEPET has been amplifying the impact of its alerts on violations by lobbying at the federal level for legislation to protect journalists and contributing to investigating the unresolved deaths of journalists. The organisation notes that the National Commission for Human Rights has found irregularities in at least six cases of murdered journalists.

Earlier this year, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) published a special report, "[The Disappeared in Mexico](#)", which revealed that seven reporters – many of whom had investigated links between public officials and drug traffickers – have vanished in the past three years.

RSF also made a recent appeal to the international community to support journalists who are trying to leave the country. The organisation has been lobbying the U.S. government to take emergency measures at the U.S. border "to make the necessary humanitarian provisions for journalists who are forced to flee into exile."

All these IFEX members have been active in monitoring and spreading information about the gross human rights violations in Mexico and have also raised their voices in unison with several joint actions and alerts that have reached international audiences through the IFEX network.

Although the work of individual organisations is significant, IFEX members have highlighted that collaborative communication, support and agreements are increasingly relevant strategies to uphold the safety of threatened journalists.

"Collaboration has helped achieve greater media coverage of aggressions against journalists and violations of the right to freedom of expression," said CEPET.

CAMPAIGNS and ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS

[Americas \(CPJ/IPJ/WPFC/IAPA\) - World press associations committee calls for more guarantees for press freedom:](#) Several IFEX members that make up the Global Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations met in New York in December to direct attention to the press freedom situation in Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. They issued a joint declaration calling for specific recommendations to achieve improvements in these countries' media landscapes.

[Andean Region \(IPYS, Lima\) - Declaration for action on deteriorating free press situation:](#) At an inaugural meeting of free expression organisations from the Andean region held in Quito in October, three IFEX members - Institute for Press and Society (IPYS), Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP), and ARTICLE 19, along with other partner organisations, signed a declaration expressing grave concern about the worsening free expression situation and demanded that the relevant governments cease restrictions and attacks on press. They committed to work together in increasing awareness about the free expression situation in the region.

[Bahrain – 24 IFEX members condemn harassment of colleagues:](#) 24 IFEX members and partners expressed their solidarity with three human rights defenders who became victims of a smear campaign after participating in a human rights meeting in Washington D.C., U.S. A. In a joint letter, the members condemned the harassment of Nabeel Ahmed Rajab, President of IFEX member Bahrain Center for Human Rights, and the other activists, that was carried out through media reports, political statements and sermons at mosques and religious centers. In a separate statement, ARTICLE 19 also called attention to the declaration made by the Bahraini Interior

Minister, when he called for enforcement of a Penal Code article that bans citizens from speaking with representatives from foreign countries without express government permission.

[Bangladesh – mission calls for media freedom ahead of election:](#) A high-level mission by International Press Institute (IPI), including Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF), visited Bangladesh from 28 November to 2 December to urge officials to guarantee media freedom in the run-up to and beyond the country's elections scheduled for 29 December. Concerned with the current restrictions imposed on journalists since January 2007 by Bangladesh's interim administration, the mission made several concrete recommendations to authorities and engaged in dialogue about how to achieve them. The recommendations included: releasing journalists held under such laws; ensuring legislation conforms to international standards on press freedom and are in line with Bangladeshi Constitution and; requesting political parties to incorporate support for a free and independent press in their election manifesto. An in-depth report about the delegation's findings will be published on IPI's website (<http://www.freemedia.at>) in early December. ARTICLE 19 has also been campaigning for Bangladesh to establish an information commission and set-up a process to address the right to information. See: <http://tinyurl.com/65aug2>

[Brazil - National Campaign for the Freedom of Expression of Teachers:](#) A year-long campaign by ARTICLE 19 and local partners Acao Educativa and the Union of the Teachers of Public Schools of the State of Sao Paulo (APEOESP) culminated in October with the launch of a campaign blog <http://www.falaeducadorfalaeducadora.livreacesso.net>. Advocating against restrictions imposed on teachers' freedom to speak in public on matters concerning their schools or colleges, this campaign included documenting cases and facilitating a public debate on the topic. It also included a petition of over 1500 signatures to revoke articles 241 and 242 of the Statute of the Civil Servants of the State of Sao Paulo – articles that limit public commentary and disclosure of information about the school system. At least 14 other states have similar legislation.

[Burkina Faso – Petition for assassinated journalist Norbert Zongo:](#) On the 10th anniversary of the murder of editor-in-chief of the weekly paper "The Independent" and a staunch press freedom advocate, the Norbert Zongo Press Centre in Ouagadougou, has launched a petition to re-open the case. Zongo had received death threats after publishing articles critical of the government prior to his death on 13 December 1998. The murderers remain at large. Sign the petition against impunity and for the reopening of his case at: <http://www.lapetition.be/petition.php?petid=3229>

[Burma – IFEX members condemn "an assault on free expression" as heavy sentences imposed on more than 100 artists, activists and journalists:](#) Members of the Burma Action Group have been actively monitoring and calling international attention to the accelerated crackdown on free speech. In a joint analysis, Index on Censorship and ARTICLE 19 outlined the recent string of sentences imposed on imprisonment of journalists, lawyers, poets and activists. PEN Canada also presented the 2008 One Humanity Award to Burmese poet, comedian and activist Maung Thura, aka Zargana who was recently sentenced to 59 years in prison. Mizzima News, Committee to Protect Journalists and other IFEX members have also raised the call to action ahead of the UN Secretary General's planned visit to Burma.

[IFEX-Tunisia Monitoring Group \(TMG\):](#) The TMG is hosting a meeting of key human rights activists and lawyers from Tunisia as part of the World Association of Newspaper's annual media freedom conference in early December in Beirut. This event intends to draw attention to the state of the country's dire human rights situation and to mobilise solidarity among journalists and rights defenders from across the region to report on the escalating violations of free expression.

[Sri Lanka – Third International mission shines spotlight on deteriorating situation:](#) In late October, Free Media Movement and other on-the-ground media organisations in Sri Lanka were joined by international groups to investigate the free expression landscape and lobby decision-makers. The mission found that independent coverage of the war has been suppressed violently by officials in an effort to limit public knowledge. The mission also galvanised around the campaign for the release of journalist J.S. Tissainayagam who is facing terrorism charges for his reporting – the first time terrorism legislation is being used in the democratic world to punish a

journalist for their work International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), International News Safety Institute (INSI), International Press Institute (IPI) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) participated in the mission led by International Media Support (IMS). See: <http://www.i-m-s.dk>

Sudan - Journalists organise against censorship; ARTICLE 19 and Human Rights Watch call for international action as arrests signify increasing repression: Following repeated suspension orders and censorship by national security services, more than 50 journalists went on a 24-hour hunger strike and shut down three newspapers in protest in early November, reported ARTICLE 19. Issues such as the Darfur conflict and the turbulent political relationship with neighbouring Chad have been the main targets of censure. Later in the month, ARTICLE 19 and Human Rights Watch signaled a rapidly deteriorating work environment for the press and human rights defenders in Khartoum, following a series of interrogations and arrests. See: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/99019/>

Tanzania - Media organizes against newspaper ban: In late October, for the first time in the history of Tanzania, local journalists expressed open outrage in the streets against the government, accusing it of trying to stifle media freedom in the country. Journalists raged against the recent three-month ban imposed on the critical "Mwanahalisi" newspaper by the government of President Jakaya Kikwete and coordinated a petition demanding that the government reverse its decision to ban the tabloid. The paper has been critical of official corruption in the country.

Yemen – Journalist released from prison expresses thanks to IFEX: In a recent letter to IFEX, upon his release from prison, journalist and human rights defender Abdel Karim al-Khaiwani thanked IFEX for efforts that led to his being freed by presidential pardon. He said: "Please allow me to express my personal gratitude to your network and to all the efforts you exerted and the support you offered for the case. Your efforts played an effective role to pressure the Yemeni authorities to release me from prison. Your support and stand were an important message that emphasised the great and indispensable value of freedom of expression and freedom of press, and its not only a national concern but also international. Your stand also emphasised that a journalist in any country is not alone against tyranny, corruption and suppression, but there are those who care and support their rights and reject any violations due to their activities in journalism and human rights activism."

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.

Organise an "internal appeal" to fellow IFEX members calling for solidarity and joint action in support of your campaign by writing to: campaigns@ifex.org.

For more information of how the IFEX Clearing House can support your campaigning efforts, see: <http://campaigns.ifex.org/en/about.html>

INTERNAL APPEALS

Your signature is needed – look out for Internal Appeals from fellow IFEX members and sign on!

JOINT ACTIONS

Azerbaijan (IRFS): The Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS) is leading a campaign through December to convince Azeri authorities not to ban major international news organisations the BBC, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and the Voice of America (VOA) from FM radio in Azerbaijan. 24 IFEX members signed a joint action letter calling for government to rescind the ban and IRFS is also conducting a web banner campaign to heighten international attention. [Join IRFS and download the banner from here.](#)

Bahrain (BCHR): 24 IFEX members and partners condemn smear campaign launched against human rights defenders, including Nabeel Ahmed Rajab, President of Bahrain Center for Human Rights, for speaking out about rights abuses. [See above for more information.](#)

Sri Lanka (IFJ/IPI): IFJ and IPI call on colleagues in South Asia and the international press to report loudly and widely on the current trial of senior Tamil journalist J.S. Tissainayagam who is defending himself against terrorism charges – a landmark case in the history of press freedom in Sri Lanka and beyond.

Tunisia (TMG): The Tunisia Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of 18 freedom of expression organisations who belong to IFEX, appealed to the Tunisian authorities and the new UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression to look into the increasing number of attacks against human rights defenders and independent journalists in Tunisia, many of them with close ties to IFEX. See the [TMG website](#) for more details.

Mexico (ARTICLE 19/CENCOS/AMARC): Civil rights groups call on Mexican government to investigate crimes against freedom of expression and tackle reigning impunity citing case of murdered journalist Brad Will as 'the tip of the iceberg'.

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

TOPICS and TOOLS

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

Human Rights Day 2008: the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is celebrated throughout the world every year on 10 December: perhaps even more so this milestone year, the 60th anniversary of the declaration. And yet the day was marked in China with police arresting several human rights activists who were organising activities around the anniversary. IFEX members and other rights groups commemorated the occasion by standing up for these activists in China, along with other human rights defenders, journalists and others who speak out for their right to free expression. The 10 December edition of the "IFEX Communiqué" provided a sampling of what they got up to around the world: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/99244/>

ADVOCACY TOOLS

UNESCO: Major International Instruments: This booklet presents data on States' ratifications, accessions and successions to human rights instruments both universal and regional. It also lists all signatories to these agreements. Handy for writing protest letters, this bi-lingual guide is also available in English and French.

10 Steps To Citizen Journalism Online: an interactive training module serving as a basic introduction to the online world of Web logs or "blogs". It's a basic outline that will help you build the machinery that runs your blog: your words and images. This guide tells you how to gather information and how to tell it – and tell it accurately.

Global Voices Online for online advocacy: The Advocacy 2.0 Guide (Tools for Digital Advocacy) describes some of the best techniques and tools that digital activists -- and others who wish to learn from this subject -- can use as part of their online advocacy campaigns.

ADVOCACY EVENTS

Annual HURIDOCS conference - 25 to 27 February 2009, Geneva, Switzerland: Under the theme: "Human Rights Council and International Criminal Court: The New Challenges for Human Rights Communications", this event will explore ways and means in which civil society can strengthen its engagement in the recently established mechanisms of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court and how to harness Information and Communication Technologies to benefit human rights communications. The Conference will be followed by the General Assembly of HURIDOCS, on the morning of 28 February – participation is welcome. The March session of the Human Rights Council will start immediately after the Conference, from 3 to 27 March. Email conference@huridocs.org for further information.

CALL TO IFEX MEMBERS

- **Want to start a campaign and need advice or support?**
- **Increase the international profile of your organisation's campaigning efforts**
- **Share articles, websites and campaigns and advocacy tools**

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