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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 4](#)

[TOPICS AND TOOLS](#) [page 5](#)

FOCUS ON MEMBER ADVOCACY

The Media Institute takes action against the Kenya Communications Act 2008

By Juliana Marin, IFEX/CJFE Program Assistant

Journalists, free expression advocates and media owners in Kenya got some bad news at the beginning of 2009, after they learned that President Mwai Kibaki had signed into law a contentious media bill that imposed new restrictions on the press. But thanks to an immediate and massive campaign launched by IFEX member the Media Institute and the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG), President Kibaki directed the Attorney General and the Information Minister to review the bill and facilitate its return to parliament for debate.

The Kenya Communications Amendment Act 2008, described as “reactionary and repressive,” set up a Communications Commission whose members are appointed by the Minister of Information and Communications. Under the act, the commission has the power to license broadcast media and draw up a programming code which all media would be required to comply with. The legislation also empowers the Minister of Information to issue directives “of general nature” on media content and to search and seize broadcast equipment, in addition to granting the Ministry the right to intercept and disclose telephone calls, emails and letters. The act also provides for heavy fines and prison sentences for press offences.

Since the bill was passed by parliament last December, the Media Institute and the KEG joined forces to prevent President Mwai Kibaki from signing the bill into law. The Media Institute convened meetings of the guild and conducted research and analysis of the bill. Letters of protest with specific recommendations to the bill were sent to Members of Parliament, to President Kibaki and to Prime Minister Raila Odinga. On 17 December, 27 IFEX organizations also took part in this massive campaign by issuing a Joint Action statement appealing to the President not to give assent to the law.

When the bill was enacted into law despite their protests, the Media Institute built a coalition with Kenyan media editors and media stakeholders and took a more aggressive stance. “We identified those politicians and MPs who had been on the frontline of pushing for the law or were fighting the media and we set up a blanket blackout,” says David Makali, Director of the Media Institute. “The argument being that those individuals should not benefit from publicity of the very media they wanted to kill”.

All media except the state/public broadcaster enforced the blackout. The Minister of Information and other government officials who had been engaged in a vicious campaign against the media

were the most affected by the boycott. There was zero coverage of their activities or statements for several days. The Kenyan government responded directly to this media strategy almost immediately. On 7 January, President Kibaki directed the Attorney General and the Information Minister to consider the amendments submitted by the media and facilitate the bill's return to parliament for discussion.

"This has been perhaps the most protracted campaign we have ever had against the government," said Makali. "Although the boycott was condemned by some sections of the public as unfair, we think that desperate situations call for desperate measures and the media was employing its weapons."

Learn more about the [Media Institute](#)

Read the joint action: [Twenty-eight IFEX members call for president to reject draconian media bill](#)

CAMPAIGNS and ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS



**Global Forum on
Freedom of Expression**
1-6 June 2009, Oslo, Norway

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Strategise with other organisations. Hold a press conference. Launch a report. Use your voice.

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[Botswana – Government responds to joint appeal by 28 IFEX members:](#) The government of Botswana responded in writing to MISA and all 28 IFEX members who signed on to a letter on 3 February asking the government to reconsider restrictive measures under a recently-passed media law. The controversial law provides for a statutory media body as well as punitive measures for breaching an imposed media code of conduct.

[China – Three IFEX members urge Clinton to place Human Rights at the top of her agenda:](#) US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton should make human rights a prominent topic of discussion in her visit to Beijing next week, seven prominent organizations said in a letter to Clinton on 12 February. Human Rights Watch (HRW), RSF and Freedom House, as well as other organisations urged the Secretary to speak publicly about censorship of the domestic press, including the jailing of Chinese journalists, and abuses of human rights defenders, such as Huang Qi and Liu Xiaobo. Highlighting the United States' past contributions to human rights, the letter advises Clinton to pressure the Chinese government to cease its widespread media and internet censorship and honour its obligation to guarantee freedom of expression, information, and freedom of the press.

[Colombia – Court sentences mastermind behind killing of journalist:](#) IFEX members, the Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP), the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), celebrated a historic victory against impunity in Colombia after a former mayor and three other public officials were convicted on 15 January for the 2003 murder of José Emeterio Rivas. According to CPJ, it is the first time the mastermind of a journalist's killing in Colombia had been convicted and jailed since 1992.

[Egypt – Court strikes down jail time but upholds fines against editors:](#) IFEX members welcomed a Cairo appeals court decision to strike down a one-year jail term against four Egyptian newspaper editors convicted of publishing material that criticized President Hosni Mubarak. IFEX members, including CPJ, Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR), Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) and World Association of Newspapers (WAN) have been actively campaigning and advocating to overturn the sentences imposed on Ibrahim Eissa, Adel Hamouda, Wael el-Abrashi and Abdel Halim Kandil who had been imprisoned since September 2007.

Gaza Strip – RSF launched media campaign against ban on foreign media access: The IFEX Clearing House assisted Reporters sans frontières (RSF) in coordinating a media campaign to pressure the Israeli government to lift the news blockade around the Gaza Strip during incursions there in January. As part of this initiative, RSF delivered a petition on 20 January to the Israeli embassy in Paris signed by 160 international media organizations, many of them fellow IFEX members. Following concerted international pressure, on 23 January, Israeli officials declared a unilateral ceasefire and allowed foreign journalists to enter and leave Gaza.

Guatemala – Nine IFEX members campaign against violence: Guatemalan journalists are threatened by increasing aggressions and intimidations not only by the state but also drug traffickers and organized criminals. Representatives of nine IFEX members in Latin America, attending a regional strategic planning meeting, condemned violence against journalists at a press conference attended by the country's most prominent media houses. The testimonies of ten journalists from areas around the country most at risk, added weight to the statement, as did the interventions Frank La Rue, UN Special Rapporteur on Free Expression and Opinion, Catalina Botero, the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Guatemalan Deputy Minister of State Arnoldo Villagrán, who attended the meeting.

Mexico – CEPET and RSF release report: “Self-censorship, Exile or Certain Death: The Choice Faced by Journalists in Ciudad Juárez”: Last November, after Mexican journalist José Armando Rodríguez was murdered, IFEX members RSF and the Centre for Journalism and Public Ethics (CEPET) organized a fact-finding visit to Ciudad Juárez to study the state of press freedom in this city. In January, both organizations released a report with their findings, which highlights the appalling dilemma facing Mexican journalists - to censor themselves, go into exile or risk almost certain death, which will go completely unpunished.

Nepal – Call for Comprehensive Freedom of Expression Reform: On 5 February, ARTICLE 19, Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and Freedom Forum launched their joint publication: “[An Agenda for Change](#),” on the occasion of the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal, which included five IFEX members RSF, IFJ, International Press Institute (IPI), and World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC). The mission prompted, in part, by the appalling murder of Nepali journalist Uma Singh. During their three-day stay in Nepal, the International Media Mission found that press freedom in the country continues to be threatened - despite the hope that democratic rule introduced last year would improve the situation. It also called on the authorities to undertake prompt, independent and impartial investigations into Singh's case, and all cases of attacks on journalists. The report “[An Agenda for Change](#)”, received extensive media coverage thanks to its in-depth analysis of the challenges facing freedom of expression in Nepal. The report also made over 60 recommendations for reform.

United States – IFEX members welcome President Obama's Initiative on Transparency: IFEX members ARTICLE 19, Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and the Institute for Press and Society (IPYS), joined other organizations around the world in signing an open letter to US President Barack Obama welcoming his initiative to promote transparency. Privacy International (PI) and ARTICLE 19 also issued a joint statement on 26 January welcoming President Obama's announcement of new policies enhancing public access to government information, in one of his first official actions as President.

TAKE ACTION

Burma (RSF): [Sign on the petition](#) by Reporters Without Borders for the release of two Burmese bloggers, Nay Phone Latt and Zarganar, who after criticizing the military regime, fell victim to its sham trials and are consequently serving 20-year and 59-year sentences respectively, in appalling prison conditions.

Russia (WiPC): International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee is asking you to send messages of condolence to the editor of "Novaya Gazeta" and take action to protest the murders of renowned

human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov who was associated with the investigative newspaper "Novaya Gazeta" and Anastasia Baburova, a reporter for the paper. [Click here to Take Action](#).

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

[Botswana \(MISA\): Call for review of restrictive media law:](#) 28 IFEX members appealed to the President of Botswana on 3 February to review the controversial Media Practitioners Act, which threatens the rights and existence of the media in the country. [See above for more information](#).

[Bahrain \(BCHR\):](#) On 6 February, 20 IFEX members around the globe expressed grave concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, demanding the Bahraini government to immediately cease all aggressions against political and human rights defenders. The group also denounced travel bans and jailing of activists who expressed their views on public issues.

[Colombia: \(CPJ/HRW\):](#) CPJ and Human Rights Watch wrote a letter on 5 February to Colombia's president, Álvaro Uribe Vélez to object to Uribe's accusations against journalist Hollman Morris, linking him to the leftist guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC); allegations which endanger his life of the journalist and jeopardise press freedom in Colombia.

[Guatemala \(CERIGUA\):](#) A press statement issued on 29 January by nine IFEX members in Latin America appealed to the Guatemala government to work with civil society organisations to guarantee the protection of journalists, whose lives are increasingly under threat by drug cartels and organized criminals.

[Kazakhstan \(Adil Soz\):](#) Last December, 22 IFEX members signed on to a letter to Kazakh Parliamentarians expressing dissatisfaction about the reform process around the national law on mass media and urged them to consider NGO proposals for change.

[Nepal \(Article 19/IFJ/IPJ/RSF/WiPC\):](#) Staggering press freedom violations in Nepal inspired a joint mission to the country from 5 to 8 February by five IFEX members and other organizations that make up the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission.

[Russia \(Article19/Index on Censorship\):](#) This joint action issued in January by two IFEX members calls on the Russian authorities to do everything in their power to bring those responsible for the murders of lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Barbuova to justice - and to demonstrate the will to address the continuing culture of impunity.

[Sri Lanka \(IFJ/IPI/RSF\)](#): On 21 January, five organisations, including three IFEX members IFJ, IPI and RSF, that belong to the International Press Freedom Mission condemned recent violence against journalists and offered support to the Sri Lankan government to create an international and independent commission to investigate recent killings and attacks on journalists.

[Tunisia \(IFEX-TMG\)](#): On 29 January, members of the IFEX-Tunisia Monitoring Group, a coalition of 18 member organisations of the IFEX network, urgently called on authorities to immediately cease blockade of Radio Kalima and investigate the abduction of journalist Dhafer Otay.

[Tunisia \(CIHRS, AAI, ANHRI, Maharat Foundation, BCHR\)](#): Five IFEX members along with other organizations issued a statement to the Tunisian government on 10 February condemning accelerated harassment of journalists and human rights defenders and demanding a stop all types of intimidation such as that which brought about the closure of the headquarters of the radio station Kalima.

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

TOPICS and TOOLS

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

[The Price of Silence global musical mosaic](#): View this inspiring musical video, featuring a global cast of talented legends of music and human rights. Produced for Amnesty International to mark the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this short film delivers a powerful message that human rights begin at home and that people world-wide are united in fighting for them. Post the video on your website and share the message today.

ADVOCACY TOOLS

[International Access to Information and Transparency Calendar](#) - The Carter Center is hosting an International Access to Information and Transparency Events Calendar. This posts information on a wide range of conferences and workshops being held around the world, and serves as a central point to share activities and learn of other organisations' events.

[Law and freedom of expression website](#) - The IBA Media Law Committee and the IBA Human Rights Institute has launched a website to encourage information sharing between media lawyers around the world. The site provides recent news, resources and information about relevant events.

[The Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\) webcast](#) – The UPR is a unique process which involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States once every four years under the auspices of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The UPR provides the opportunity for each state to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfill their human rights obligations. Watch a live webcast of the proceedings or view previous sessions.

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>