

Issue 11: January/February 2008

# IFEX Advocacy Action News

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

## IN THIS ISSUE:

[IFEX CAMPAIGNS AND ADVOCACY SUPPORT PROGRAMME UPDATES](#) [pages 1-2](#)

[RAPID AND ORGANISED ACTION RESPONSE \(ROAR\)](#) [pages 2-3](#)

[MEMBER ADVOCACY FOCUS](#) [pages 3-4](#)

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

## IFEX CAMPAIGNS and ADVOCACY SUPPORT PROGRAMME

### **Burma Action Group (BAG) campaigning strategy under way**

In a joint action letter to Ibrahim Gambari, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Burma, 15 IFEX members and other organisations of BAG called attention to the difficult conditions facing Burmese journalists both inside and outside the country. The letter urged Gambari to consider the media situation during his mission to Burma, calling for a thorough investigation into the killing of Japanese AFP photographer Kenji Nagai who died on 27 September during the crackdown in Rangoon. Members of BAG also offered to assist in the drafting of a status report on Internet access as well as on missing, killed and jailed journalists. With a working group of BAG, ARTICLE 19 convened a conference call in January to forge an advocacy and campaigning action plan. Future activities will focus on a media coverage campaign, lobbying the UN, Chinese and Indian governments, as well as a lobbying the Japanese government to prompt an investigation into Nagai's murder.

### **Fourth International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal**

Between 14 and 17 January, the Federation of Nepali Journalists hosted the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal, a collaboration of 12 organisations which includes nine IFEX members. Following the mission's recommendations, the Nepali government promised to "take seriously" the safety of media workers. The International Mission raised serious concerns about continuing press freedom violations, particularly as "impartial and independent media coverage would be essential for holding free and fair elections" for a Constituent Assembly on 10 April. The mission recommended constitutional protection of free expression, decent working conditions for journalists, and steps to be taken to curb impunity in cases of human rights violations. These recommendations and others will be included in the full mission report, which will be released in the coming weeks.

### **IFEX-TMG engages Mohamed Abbou to monitor trial of Tunisian journalist Slim Boukhdhir**

The Tunisia Monitoring Group (IFEX-TMG), a coalition of 18 IFEX members, urged the Tunisian government to release journalist Slim Boukhdhir, who was on trial on 18 January in Sfax, Tunisia's second largest city, for writing critical articles on President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and the first lady's family. Mohamed Abbou, a prominent human rights lawyer who spent more than two years in jail for criticising Ben Ali and exposing the use of torture in Tunisian prisons, is a member of Boukhdhir's legal team and observed the trial on behalf of the IFEX-TMG. At the trial, Boukhdhir's one-year prison sentence was upheld, which IFEX-TMG condemned in a subsequent joint action. The joint statement was quoted by AFP, and al Jazeera interviewed Abbou about the hearing. CPJ, RSF and other groups also condemned the sentence.

### **Latin American Groups Engage in Regional Discussions on “Parallel Powers”**

IFEX Latin American groups have been engaged in dialogue, action and analysis surrounding the ever-growing threat to free expression posed by ‘parallel powers’ in Mexico, Central and South America. These powerful ‘parallel power’ groups act outside the rule of law sometimes with support from governments or officials, and in many cases wield immense influence over journalists who are threatened, killed, censor themselves out of fear, or are forced into hiding. IFEX members are carrying out long-term planning aimed at systematic monitoring of the situation, assessing differences and similarities across the region, and advocating for change in face of the problem. For a recent capsule report produced by CERIGUA with a focus on Guatemala, see: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/90311/>

### **CMFR seeks IFEX member input for class action suit by Filipino media**

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) is involved in research concerning recent cases filed in court in response to the Manila Pen media arrests and other subsequent forms of government threats, intimidation, and harassment. The group writes to request input from IFEX members regarding "similar cases filed by the press in other countries where the Philippines could draw lessons or probable models." Information would be welcome on cases filed by the media against government personnel in response to any form of press freedom violation. Contact Jose Bimbo Santos, press alerts officer at CMFR, at: [jose.bimbo@gmail.com](mailto:jose.bimbo@gmail.com)

### **FXI seeks IFEX member input for proposed South African Media Tribunal**

The Free Expression Institute (FXI) is seeking IFEX member input. Jane Duncan, FXI executive director, writes, "In South Africa, the ruling ANC is planning to establish, through Parliament, a Media Tribunal, which will act as an appeals body for the Press Ombudsman, in instances where people feel their rights have been violated. It will be accountable to Parliament. It is unclear what sort of sanctions negative judgements will attract. But the suspicion is that the ANC wants to clamp down on the print media in the light of the reporting in the "Sunday Times" on the Health Minister. Needless to say, if it is set up, then the whole system of print media self-regulation will collapse. I am trying to find out if there are other members of IFEX who have been faced with opposing the establishment of such bodies." Please contact FXI with details about the countries involved, whether authorities were successful in establishing media tribunals, and what the outcome was in these countries. Jane heard that Fiji was looking at the establishment of a similar tribunal, but can not find information after 1999. Contact Jane at: [jduncan@fxi.org.za](mailto:jduncan@fxi.org.za)

## **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](mailto:campaigns@ifex.org) if your organisation would like more information, or see: <http://campaigns.ifex.org/en/about.html>

### **INTERNAL APPEALS FOR JOINT ACTION**

**Tunisia (IFEX-TMG):** IFEX-TMG called for the release of journalist Slim Boukhdhir and denounced the upholding of his once-year prison sentence. See: <http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg/index.html>

**Kenya (Media Institute):** Twenty-three IFEX members condemned the Kenyan government's decision to ban live TV and radio broadcasts in response to post-election violence. See: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/89692/>

**The Gambia (Media Foundation for West Africa/Network of African Free Expression Organisations):** Three years after his death, 21 IFEX members demanded an investigation into journalist Deyda Hydar's murder. See: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/88886/>

**Pakistan (Pakistan Press Foundation):** Twenty-seven IFEX members called for an end to the state of emergency and the resulting restrictions on and harassment of journalists. See: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/87593/>

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

## FOCUS ON MEMBER ADVOCACY

### **IFEX members collaborate and advocate to stop violence against Somalia's journalists**

By Katie Meyer, IFEX Alerts/Outreach Coordinator

2007 was a brutal year for Somali journalists: nine reporters were killed, 53 media professionals were arrested, and five media houses were closed down, reports the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ). Press freedom violations skyrocketed by over 85 percent from the previous year, as political unrest and civil war escalated.

"This terrible record has given Somalia the unwelcome titles of 'most dangerous country in Africa for journalists' and the 'second most perilous place for journalists in the world, after Iraq'," says Omar Faruk Osman, NUSOJ's secretary general.

To draw attention to the dangers journalists in this war-torn country face, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE) honoured the late Somali-Canadian journalist Ali Iman Sharmarke in November 2007 with the Tara Singh Hayer Award, which recognises Canadians for courage in journalism.

In 1999, Sharmarke had returned to Somalia from exile in Canada, to launch Horn Afrik – the country's first independent television and radio station. He was killed last August, when his car drove over a remote-controlled landmine as he was returning from the funeral of another journalist, Mahad Ahmed Elmi, who had been murdered.

### **Efforts made for exiled journalists**

"As a journalist, you are the enemy of all groups in Somalia so you are extremely vulnerable," says Falastin Ahmed Iman, a journalist from Horn Afrik.

Iman was a survivor of the same blast that killed Sharmarke, and fled to Kenya soon after the incident. She joins more than 55 other journalists who were forced to leave the south-central regions of Somalia for Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Europe last year. Many of these media professionals lack identification or immigration papers and thus are vulnerable to deportation. They find it difficult to financially support themselves and their families. Iman says journalists also fear losing their skills and their career since it can be difficult to practise their profession in exile.

Several IFEX members have been working together, along with other human rights organisations, to support Somali journalists in exile like Iman, through emergency funds and professional development support.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) is working with East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net), and seeking other partners, in the building a safe house for exiled journalists from the region. In response to the crisis in Somalia, in December NUSOJ established a safe house in Djibouti after authorities shut down an existing one they had founded in Hargeisha (Somaliland). The organisation has also visited exiled journalists in Africa

and Europe, writing letters of support to immigration authorities to help with their asylum cases, and coordinating advocacy and financial support with IFEX members and other organisations.

"Almost all exiled journalists have protection and financial support, thanks to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), CPJ, EHAHRD-Net, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Reporters sans frontières (RSF), Freedom House, Rory Peck Trust, Journalists Help Journalists, ARTICLE 19, International News Safety Institute (INSI), World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and Amnesty International," says Faruk Osman. "These groups have been working cooperatively to coordinate their support."

To mark International Human Rights Day on 10 December, ARTICLE 19 and NUSOJ, along with EHAHRD-Net, Amnesty International and the UN Human Rights Adviser for Somalia, coordinated a joint advocacy event to spotlight the situation of Somalia's journalists. The initiative was combined with the launch of a two-week training programme for exiled journalists in Nairobi, Kenya, that included workshops on media and conflict reporting, self-regulation, media ethics, media and gender, media and elections and good governance. It was sponsored by the French embassy in Nairobi.

"There was overwhelming enthusiasm from Somali journalists for the training and the numbers wanting to participate, which significantly exceeded what we expected. Since the renewed violence in Somalia, there seems to be an overwhelming and increasing need to support exiled Somali journalists," says Roxanne Abdulali, ARTICLE 19's Africa programme officer.

### **Raising the call for journalists' safety through joint action**

The situation inside Somalia remains extremely dangerous for the many journalists who regularly suffer verbal abuse, harassment and intimidation at the hands of government authorities and warlords. Many free expression violations are going unreported, largely due to fears of reprisal.

IFEX members and other organisations are keeping journalists' safety inside Somalia in the headlines and on political agendas by continuing to monitor and raise awareness of free expression violations as well as through coordinated joint actions.

"Discussion on safety of the journalists should be the most important issue – how to improve safety through practical actions, as well as pursue coordination at the national and international levels," says Thomas Hughes, deputy director of International Media Support (IMS).

So IMS is organising an informal meeting this spring among national and international media support actors working on Somalia, with a specific look at the press freedom and media safety environments. IMS has also been working with ARTICLE 19 and other IFEX members to support the development and implementation of Somalia's media law. As IMS points out, while the draft law was approved by the Transitional Federal Parliament on its first reading in December 2007, there is a need to revise it substantially to bring it into line with international standards.

NUSOJ will be sending a delegation to the UN Human Rights Council's March 2008 session to testify on the situation of freedom of expression and of the press in Somalia, as well as on the broader human rights situation.

Also in March, the CPJ is planning a mission to Somaliland/Somalia, which will involve meetings with government officials in Somaliland (Hargeisa) and Somalia (Baidoa) to advocate for government protection of Mogadishu journalists and amendments to the Somalia/Somaliland media laws. CPJ is interested in collaborating on the mission. Interested groups can contact CPJ's Africa programme coordinator, Tom Rhodes, at: [trhodes@cpi.org](mailto:trhodes@cpi.org)

# TOPICS and TOOLS

## WEBSITES OF INTEREST

**FreeAccess Plus!:** An Iranian software developer, MohammedR, has created an extension for web browser Mozilla Firefox that enables users to circumvent the filters in Iran and other countries that are censoring popular Web 2.0 websites, such as YouTube, del.icio.us, Flickr, Technorati.com, livejournal.com, MySpace and Hi5. To install the plug-in go to: <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/6139>

**Human Rights Watch Campaign on China:** Ahead of China's hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games, Human Rights Watch is keeping the focus on China's well-documented history of serious human rights abuses, including widespread torture, censorship of the media and Internet, controls on religious freedom, and repression of ethnic minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang. The organisation also highlights that though the government classifies the number of people executed as a state secret, it is believed that China executes many more people than the rest of the world combined each year. See: <http://china.hrw.org/>

**The Free Media Movement (FMM) in Sri Lanka has launched a new blog** where readers can find all the organisation's press releases, alerts, e-bulletins and features. The blog will replace FMM's website until it is re-launched in a new trilingual format later in 2008. See: <http://freemediasrilanka.wordpress.com> and subscribe to FFM's updates at: <http://freemediasrilanka.wordpress.com/feed/>

## ADVOCACY TOOLS

**Documentary on freedom of expression available:** "Independent Mind", a 90-minute documentary by filmmaker Rex Bloomstein, features interviews with people who have been persecuted for exercising their right to free expression. Bloomstein used IFEX contacts in his research for the film and is interested in seeing it screened as an advocacy tool and a catalyst for debate in 2008, the year of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For more information contact: [sarah.greene@rexentertainment.co.uk](mailto:sarah.greene@rexentertainment.co.uk)

**The Hub for Human Rights Media and Action** uses information and communication technology (ICT) to provide a space and a resource for human rights advocates around the world. The human rights organisation WITNESS created the Hub, a community-driven, participatory website, to let everyday people bring their human rights stories and campaigns to global attention through videos, audio or photos, so that that may educate and motivate others to act to end human rights violations and create community around their issues. See: <http://www.comminit.com/en/node/134495>

## 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 coordinator at: [campaigns@ifex.org](mailto:campaigns@ifex.org) or see: <http://campaigns.ifex.org/en/index.html>