

Issue 2: September 2006

# **IFEX Advocacy Action News**

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

## **IN THIS ISSUE:**

**IFEX CAMPAIGNS AND ADVOCACY SUPPORT PROGRAMME** page 1-2

- Message from the Editor; About the Programme
- Programme Highlights: Mission to Nepal, TMG, The Gambia and more!

**'ROAR'**

- Rapid and Organised Action Response to Free Expression Violations page 2
- Sign on to Joint Actions!

**MEMBER ADVOCACY FOCUS** page 3

- Campaigning Against Impunity: An interview with the Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility

**MEMBERS LINK** page 4

- Articles of Interest; Other Campaigns Around the World; Tools for Effective Campaigning
- IFEX member submissions requested ~ Share articles, tools and announcements

## **IFEX CAMPAIGNS and ADVOCACY SUPPORT PROGRAMME**

### **Message from the Editor**

Welcome to the second edition of *IFEX Advocacy Action News!*

This monthly IFEX bulletin focuses on the vital efforts of IFEX members to advocate in defence of the right to free expression. Last month we witnessed the release of Ramin Jahanbegloo from an Iranian jail, and heard about the efforts of PEN Canada and others in promoting his case. We continue to witness many intense battles underway against impunity, such as the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility's (CMFR) tireless efforts in the Philippines, where large numbers of journalists are being murdered (see the FOCUS section.)

In China, Ching Cheong was recently sentenced to prison on spying charges. The Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) continues to work towards securing his release. It has extended its signature campaign and is lobbying the United Nations. In other advocacy news, a third international mission to Nepal, involving several IFEX members, took place in September to assess the state of free expression in the post-revolution period. The mission is working with the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), the Center for Human Rights and Democratic Studies (CEHURDES) and other national organisations to push for progressive media law reforms and to lobby officials to ensure stronger safeguards for freedom of expression and press freedom. A collaborative effort by various groups (IFEX members and others) is in development to address attacks on journalists, censorship, and legal reforms in Sri Lanka that we hope to hear more about soon.

These are a few of the many advocacy efforts underway. Read on for further details on how IFEX members are organising advocacy efforts, and ways that you can support them.

-IFEX Campaigns Coordinator Sheila Gruner ([gruner@ifex.org](mailto:gruner@ifex.org))

## **About the Programme**

The Campaigns and Advocacy Support Programme at IFEX is a new and developing programme that aims to foster collaboration among IFEX members, provide training and advice, and deepen their commitment to addressing free expression violations. IFEX members can use *IFEX Advocacy Action News* to tell other members about campaigns they are working on, to seek signatures for joint actions and to ask for support on getting campaigns started. Many IFEX members are versed in legal issues, advocacy training and campaigns planning that can assist journalists and journalists' organisations in need.

## **Programme highlights**

- **A regional effort involving multiple IFEX Latin American members** is in the process of development, aimed at researching and addressing the risks and threats to free expression posed by illegal groups and others linked to them.
- **Evaluation of Campaigns Handbook and GM Skills workshop underway**. Thanks to all members who have responded to the email questionnaire – your input is crucial. For those who would like to participate and have not yet received a survey, please email Sheila at [gruner@ifex.org](mailto:gruner@ifex.org)
- **NEW!!!** The "*Campaigning For Free Expression*" Handbook is now available in Russian. See <http://www.ifex.org/download/russian/IFEXCampaignHandbookRussian.pdf>

## **On-going and New IFEX Member-Involved Campaigns**

**The Gambia** is a country where press and free expression abuses are rampant. The Network of African Free Expression Organizations (NAFEO) has added it to its priority list for campaigning on behalf of journalists under threat. Stay tuned for further updates.

**The International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal**, a coalition effort coordinated by International Media Support (IMS) and involving various IFEX members, has been underway since 2005. Three missions have gone to the country since 2005, the most recent taking place from 4 to 7 September 2006. The following is a 7 September 2006 statement by the mission: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/76939/>

**The Tunisia Monitoring Group (TMG)** is a coalition of 15 IFEX member organisations that monitors free expression violations in the country and works to campaign against censorship. For further information, contact Kristina Stockwood ([stockwood@ifex.org](mailto:stockwood@ifex.org)).

## **RAPID AND ORGANISED ACTION RESPONSES (ROAR)**

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Rapid and Organised Action Responses (ROAR) are part of the IFEX Campaigns programme strategy to support rapid, short term follow-up actions to free expression violations. Write to Sheila at ([gruner@ifex.org](mailto:gruner@ifex.org)) if your organisation would like more information or would like to engage in a ROAR activity.

- **Holman Morris – Colombia**: Morris and other journalists and human rights organisations have received multiple death threats for their work related to Colombia's conflict. CJFE recently named Morris one of the winners of its *International Press Freedom Award*, which recognises his outstanding work in defending press freedom. The award will help to raise awareness of threats to journalists and free expression in Colombia.

**WATCH FOR JOINT ACTION LETTERS – YOUR SIGNATURE IS NEEDED!!**

## **Joint actions that need IFEX member support NOW:**

- **Ching Cheong – China (Hong Kong):** The Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) has extended the deadline of its request for signatures for a joint action protesting the detention of Hong Kong journalist Ching Cheong. The reporter was recently charged with espionage. To read HKJA's joint action, see: [http://www.ifex.org/download/en/HKJA\\_ChingCheong\\_Aug06.doc](http://www.ifex.org/download/en/HKJA_ChingCheong_Aug06.doc)

Contact Serenade Woo, Chairperson of the HKJA, to sign on to the joint action letter: [serenadewoo@yahoo.com.hk](mailto:serenadewoo@yahoo.com.hk)

## **Joint action campaigns to watch for:**

- **Marlene Esperat - Philippines:** The case of columnist Marlene Esperat's murder is currently being tried in the Philippines. The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) is preparing an internal appeal letter that it will circulate to IFEX members for signing in October. Contact Nathan Lee at [nathan@cmfr-phil.org](mailto:nathan@cmfr-phil.org)

For a primer on the **Marlene Esperat case**, see: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/75260/>

## **MEMBER ADVOCACY FOCUS**

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*The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) in the Philippines has been working tirelessly to address the unsolved attacks and murders of Philippine journalists and is currently campaigning for justice in the murder case of journalist Marlene Esperat. Nathan Lee, CMFR's Press Alerts Officer, was interviewed by Sheila Gruner, IFEX Campaigns Programme Coordinator, in early September 2006.*

### **How many journalists have been murdered in the Philippines?**

As of 15 August 2006, our database lists 59 journalists/media practitioners killed in the line of duty since 1986. Three have been killed so far this year.

### **Why is there such a high level of impunity in the country?**

Based on our study, the lack of efficient law enforcement – especially in the provinces – and the relatively slow justice system contribute mainly to the high level of impunity in the country.

### **What are the current cases CMFR is working on?**

As part of a network of Philippine media organisations that conduct advocacy on press freedom cases, CMFR is currently working on assisting slain journalists' families in pursuing justice by pushing for decisive court convictions against the killers and their masterminds.

Among the cases CMFR has been watching closely are the ongoing trials of the murders of Marlene Esperat, Roger Mariano and Philip Agustin. We are aiming for at least one conviction this year.

In a different area of work (libel cases against journalists), we are gathering data on the number of cases filed against journalists in recent years. This year, as of 15 August, there have been at least 13 reported criminal cases filed against journalists, ranging from charges of libel to inciting sedition. This does not include a conviction upheld by the Court of Appeals in July 2005 against popular tabloid columnist Raffy Tulfo, who was slapped with 14 counts of libel (equivalent to 28 years of imprisonment). There have also been at least 10 libel cases -- involving no less than 44 journalists -- that have been filed by President Gloria Arroyo's husband.

**What kinds of advocacy strategies does CMFR engage in to bring attention to impunity cases?**

CMFR looks into the circumstances behind the cases, and works closely with international media organisations, providing them with information on the cases for which they follow-up and give special support. (See the SEAPA backgrounder on “*Culture of Impunity in the Philippines*” <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/61045/>)

We also report attacks on press freedom to government agencies (e.g., Philippine National Police, Department of Justice, etc.), international human rights advocates, and the media. In addition to these, CMFR has facilitated strategies to urge prompt police action and to raise funds for legal defence and assistance to victims’ families.

As part of its advocacy, CMFR has conducted ethics and safety training as a way of protecting the press against violence. In discouraging the use of extra-judicial actions against journalists, CMFR has established community press councils in key areas of the country to accommodate complaints of ethical malpractice and abuse by media practitioners.

**What are the main successes and challenges that you have had so far in this advocacy work?**

We recently recorded a successful prosecution in the case of Edgar Damalerio. His killer, ex-policeman Guillermo Wapile, was convicted to life imprisonment in November 2005, three years after the murder took place. Just eight months earlier, CMFR and its partner organisations successfully lobbied the Supreme Court to transfer the trial to a safer, more neutral court in Cebu City.

This year, the Supreme Court approved the transfer of the Esperat, Mariano, and Agustin cases to courts in Cebu and Manila, thereby increasing the chances of speedy and decisive trials.

Several challenges that we have been facing in our work include the apparent lack of cooperation from certain government agencies and the high number of press freedom attacks and threats, especially in the provinces.

**What kind of support can IFEX members and the international community offer?**

Constant monitoring and corresponding pressure from the international community will help force the Philippine government to act decisively in resolving the attacks against, and threats to, the press and the journalists.

## **MEMBERS LINK**

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**Articles of Interest:**

**Libel Cases in the Philippines**

The International Herald Tribune has published an article about the numerous libel cases that Philippine President Gloria Arroyo’s husband has filed against more than 40 journalists:

<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2006/09/19/news/philis.php>

**Malaysia’s Merdeka Day and Media Freedom**

Steven Gan, the editor-in-chief of Malaysia’s leading source of independent news, *Malaysiakini*, reflects on the state of media freedom on the occasion of *Merdeka* Day, Malaysia’s day of independence.

<http://freeexpressionasia.wordpress.com/2006/09/01/merdeka-day-thoughts-on-media-freedom/>

## **Other Free Expression Campaigns from around the world:**

### **Signature Campaign Against the Restriction of Free Exchange of Creative Works**

Sign the joint statement for the protection of broadcasts and broadcasting organisations:

<http://see.oneworld.net/article/view/139345/1/>

## **Tools for Effective Campaigning:**

### **Best Practices in On-line Advocacy**

[http://www.getactive.com/pdf/white-papers/online\\_advocacy.pdf](http://www.getactive.com/pdf/white-papers/online_advocacy.pdf)

### **IFEX Campaigning For Free Expression Handbook:**

This handbook is a toolbox of tips, best practice case studies and resources for campaigning in defense of free expression. It is available in English, French and Spanish, and now in Russian. It is also being translated into Farsi, Arabic and Turkish.

See: <http://www.ifex.org/download/en/IFEXCampaignHandbook.pdf>

## ***Call to IFEX members:***

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

**Contact Sheila Gruner, IFEX Campaigns Coordinator at [gruner@ifex.org](mailto:gruner@ifex.org)**