

Issue 7: March/April 2007

# IFEX Advocacy Action News

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

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## IFEX CAMPAIGNS and ADVOCACY SUPPORT PROGRAMME

### IFEX Latin American groups to strategise on 'parallel powers'

Latin America has become a minefield for journalists, in part because of attacks by drug traffickers and organised crime. The high incidence of threats, attacks and murders is paving the way for a resurgence of self-censorship in a region that has had to struggle for decades against the silence imposed by dictatorial regimes. The rise of drug trafficking and organised crime during the last few years, compounded by indifference, a lack of control – or worse – collusion or tacit support on the part of the state in some countries, has left journalists feeling vulnerable and has prompted the rebirth of self-censorship. Latin American IFEX members will meet in Mexico in mid-April to strategise and develop ideas for advocacy and campaigning in the face of these mounting problems – with the idea that a more developed campaign initiative will be presented to IFEX members at the October General Meeting.

### Member Advocacy Highlights:

#### **Campaign: Free Mohamed Abbou!**

IFEX members joined Tunisian human rights groups in a day of action to free jailed Tunisian lawyer and human rights activist Mohamed Abbou, who marked his second year in jail on 1 March 2007. Statements were made by a number of IFEX members. In Paris, Reporters sans frontières held a protest in front of the Tunisian tourist office calling for Abbou's liberation. A mission representing the IFEX Tunisia Monitoring Group (TMG) tried to visit Abbou but was prevented from seeing him. The full IFEX-TMG mission report will be available next week in English, French and Arabic. Visit the TMG website at <http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg/>.

## RAPID AND ORGANISED ACTION RESPONSE (ROAR)

Rapid and Organised Action Response (ROAR) is part of the IFEX Campaigns Programme strategy to support rapid, 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 – YOUR SIGNATURE IS NEEDED!!**

**Eritrea** (PEN Canada/MFWA): Pen Canada and MFWA urge IFEX members to sign an internal appeal for joint action calling on the Eritrean government to account publicly for the fate of four independent journalists in Eritrea, whose deaths have been reported in recent months, and to immediately and unconditionally release all remaining journalists currently in jail. See the internal appeal at: [http://www.ifex.org/download/en/eritrea\\_april2007.doc](http://www.ifex.org/download/en/eritrea_april2007.doc) and send your signature to [campaigns@ifex.org](mailto:campaigns@ifex.org) with a copy to [dcozac@pencanada.ca](mailto:dcozac@pencanada.ca) before 14 April 2007.

### **Recent joint actions supported by IFEX members:**

**Uzbekistan** (Adil Soz/CJES): On 2 March, 14 IFEX members collaborated in a joint action to protest the ongoing harassment of independent journalists and public activists in Uzbekistan and to campaign for the release of independent journalist Umida Niyazova. See: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/81461/>

**Philippines** (IFJ/IFEX) - Journalists and organisations from 14 countries protested impunity for crimes against media workers in this global call for action on journalists' safety in the Philippines. See: <http://ifex.org/en/content/view/full/81372/>

## **MEMBER ADVOCACY FOCUS**

This section highlights work being carried out by IFEX members in the areas of advocacy and campaigning. In this issue, Sunanda Deshapriya of the Free Media Movement (FMM) in Sri Lanka is interviewed and the dramatic situation facing journalists and media support organisations in the country is chronicled, with recommendations on how IFEX members can lend support.

By Sheila Gruner and Katie Meyer, IFEX CH

### **Sri Lankan journalists face danger and repression as media situation deteriorates**

The IFEX Action Alert Network has received and distributed over 40 items about the media situation in Sri Lanka since the beginning of 2007, many of which reported on high-level cases of harm and danger to journalists and media outlets.

The conflict in Sri Lanka has been escalating since the failure of the 2002 peace talks. As tension and violence rises between government, paramilitary groups and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), journalists and media outlets are facing increased dangers as they try to cover the political and economic situation in the country. Government crackdowns on media outlets and violence carried out by armed groups illustrates intolerance of criticism in both the Tamil and Sinhalese press.

FMM, a Colombo-based media support organisation, has been at the forefront of the struggle to protect journalists' rights, address the deteriorating human rights situation, and fight for change in the midst of increasing repression in the country.

Sunanda Deshapriya, Convenor of FMM, often incurs almost unbearable stress in his efforts to monitor and report on the free expression situation. In the midst of regular attacks on press freedom Deshapriya has been stigmatised by the government and extreme nationalist forces that have targeted him as "unpatriotic." In January 2007, Deshapriya, along with other journalists, was the target of death threats (see: <http://ifex.org/en/content/view/full/80498/>.) Reports of abductions, assaults, threats and harassment of journalists, as well as fears fuelled by numerous armed

checkpoints, have been mounting since the beginning of 2007. Six media workers have been killed since 2005.

Deshapriya's family and close friends are constantly uneasy. At the same time they realise that the risks he takes are part of an important collective effort to defend the rights of the people, press and free expression in the country. To carry out this critically important work, Deshapriya relies on several crucial strategies, including: "working together with journalist organisations to support one another rather than working as individuals; being on the offensive rather than the defensive concerning free expression issues; practicing daily safety measures; and having a mindset that reinforces freedom from fear." He also underlines the importance of international press freedom organisations keeping a vigilant eye on the developments in the country.

On 29 January 2007, seven IFEX members were among those who signed a joint action letter urging authorities to address the newsprint and ink shortage in Jaffna. The road between Colombo and Jaffna has been closed since last year due to heavy fighting and newsprint and ink are not allowed onto the few ships carrying supplies to Jaffna. As a result, several newspapers had to shut down or severely cut down the size and frequency of their publications. At the same time, journalists have been prevented from covering the conflict zone in the northern and eastern parts of the country and are disallowed access to LTTE-controlled zones altogether.

There have been two press freedom missions to the country in the past year, including an international mission involving IFEX members and other groups, as well as a second mission representing South Asian free expression organisations. Deshapriya feels that these missions are especially important for developing multi-stakeholder strategies to confront the situation. They also send a message to the government that a coalition of organisations is acting together. Subsequent to these missions, there have been fast and pointed responses by participating groups to threats, including support for the safety of FMM staff. Another international mission is planned for early May 2007.

While structural and economic pressures mount, so do direct threats against journalists and media workers. Government ministers have been publicly threatening journalists, even inciting mobs to attack them at public rallies. According to FMM, the application of the new anti-terrorism laws is encouraging self-censorship and there appears to be an emerging and dangerous trend of intolerance toward, and the forceful suppression of, anti-war and pro-peace sentiments in Sri Lanka. FMM cites another important media-related issue that serves to deepen the conflict, which is that "there is virtually no entertainment in the form of art and cultural activity or the representation of either in the media. A civilian population denied entertainment is forced to face continuously their singular plight, which is a cause of psychological trauma and the further hardening of hearts and minds between communities in the peninsula and the rest of the country."

A group of Sri Lankan journalists who visited the IFEX Clearing House in early March praised the work of FMM staff, who are working part-time or on a voluntary basis, saying: "They are the only ones speaking up against repression of free expression."

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and Reporters sans frontières (RSF) are also monitoring the free expression situation in Sri Lanka. IFEX members are encouraged to support FMM and other media rights organisations in Sri Lanka, which, according to FMM, could take the form of pro-active monitoring of the situation and advocating for safety and legal and economic support. IFEX members could write to Sri Lankan embassies in their own countries, and participate in joint campaigning. More pressure needs to be exerted on the Sri Lankan government from all over the globe, including through embassies, the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, and by fostering public awareness in members' respective countries by writing about the situation in the local and international media.

The following is a brief summary of some of the main concerns or points of reference that should guide assistance for journalists and media support organisations in Sri Lanka, according to FMM:

- There is a general deterioration of human rights and rule of law
- Self-censorship and unofficial censorship stem from pressure by authorities and armed groups
- Anti-terrorist legislation is being used against journalists and vocal critics
- Tamil media and Tamil journalists face unprecedented suppression of rights, including the right to life
- Hate campaigns are being executed by government leaders and extreme Sinhala nationalist forces against journalists and media who are trying to cover the conflict from all sides
- The government is pushing for a “patriotic press”, instead of a professional media, openly stating that media has to decide between supporting the country or terrorism
- There is shrinking space for dissenting voices, co-opting by government and suppression of critical media
- There is no right to information
- The state media is politically controlled

### **Sri Lanka Links**

**Free Media Movement (FMM):** <http://www.freemediasrilanka.org/>

**IFEX Feature Story on Conflict in Sri Lanka:** <http://ifex.org/en/content/view/full/80773/>

**Groundviews:** Sri Lanka's first and only tri-lingual citizen journalism website features a wide range of articles on humanitarian issues, media freedom, human rights, peace, democracy, constitutional reform and governance. See: <http://www.groundviews.org>

**Groundviews Special Report - Media Freedom in Sri Lanka:** "Investigate us, or stop the harassment and false allegations!" was the clarion call by Sunanda Deshapriya, Spokesperson of the Free Media Movement (FMM), to all those who were inciting hatred and violence against journalists in Sri Lanka. For details, please read the full story: <http://www.groundviews.org/2007/03/07/investigate-us-or-stop-the-harassment-and-false-allegations/>

**Mission Report – "Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression in Sri Lanka: Struggle for Survival":** The final report of the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Sri Lanka was released on 7 March 2007, in Colombo. The mission visited Sri Lanka from 9 - 11 October 2006 and was comprised of five members from leading international press freedom and human rights organisations. See: [http://www.freemediasrilanka.org/index.php?action=con\\_news\\_full&id=478&section=news](http://www.freemediasrilanka.org/index.php?action=con_news_full&id=478&section=news)

**International journalist community lobbies for release of Sri Lankan journalist:** IFJ has been joined by press freedom and journalists' organisations around the world in demanding the release of Sri Lankan journalist Munusamy Parameshawary (23), who has been detained without charge by the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) for more than 60 days. For the full media release, see: <http://www.ifj-asia.org/files/srilanka070131-parameshawary.doc>

**Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) – Commentary on the Commission of Inquiry:** Based in Colombo, Sri Lanka, the CPA is an independent, non-partisan organisation that focuses primarily on issues of governance and conflict resolution, which has continuously called on the state and other actors to address the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation. Along with other civil society organisations, the CPA welcomed the announcement on 4 September 2006 of an international independent commission to probe abductions, disappearances and extra-judicial killings in all areas of Sri Lanka. For a report and recommendations see: [http://www.cpalanka.org/research\\_papers/Col\\_and\\_IIGP\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/Col_and_IIGP_FINAL.pdf)

## Topics and Tools

### **Topics of Interest:**

#### **WAN's 2007 World Press Freedom Day Package**

The World Association of Newspapers (WAN) has published its 2007 World Press Freedom Day package with the theme "Press Under Surveillance". To download images and articles in five languages and reprint them, please visit: [www.worldpressfreedomday.org](http://www.worldpressfreedomday.org)

#### **World Press Freedom Day 2007 website now online**

UNESCO launched a website dedicated to World Press Freedom Day to be celebrated in Medellin, Colombia on 3 May. The website provides regular news services, practical information, more detail on the conference, speakers and participants. This year's event consists of a two-day conference on the theme "Press Freedom, Safety of Journalists and Impunity" and the award of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize 2007 posthumously to Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya. See: [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=23971&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=23971&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

### **Advocacy Tools:**

**Human Rights Tools:** This provides a very useful one-stop shop on human rights news and resources, and is now featuring IFEX RSS feeds. See: <http://www.humanrightstools.org/news.htm> (under Human Rights News).

**The Press Institute for Women in the Developing World:** An international non-profit organisation and citizen journalism initiative, the Institute was founded on the belief that journalism is an empowering tool that can bring voice, strength and light to issues that are hidden and people who are oppressed. It is in this vein that the Institute trains women in developing countries to serve as reporters in their own communities. See: <http://www.piwdw.org/>

**ARTICLE 19 releases "Central Asian Pocketbook on Freedom of Expression":** The Pocketbook is a key resource for anyone with an interest in promoting freedom of expression, particularly in the Central Asian republics, but also more widely, including journalists, politicians, activists, judges and media lawyers. It can be downloaded in English at <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/tools/central-asian-pocketbook.pdf> and in Russian at <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/tools/central-asian-pocketbook-ru.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 the IFEX Campaigns Coordinator at [campaigns@ifex.org](mailto:campaigns@ifex.org) or see <http://campaigns.ifex.org/en/index.html>