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# 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

### Member Advocacy Highlights:

#### **Latin American members plan activities on "parallel powers"**

IFEX Latin American groups gathered in Mexico on 17 and 18 April, concerned with the increasing attacks on journalists and media organisations by "parallel powers" - illegal armed groups who sometimes work in collaboration with state officials. With support from the IFEX Clearing House, members met to share experiences and perspectives and to develop strategies towards a regional campaign. The meeting was attended by the Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP), Institute for Press and Society (IPYS), Centre for Informative Reports on Guatemala (CERIGUA), PROBIDAD, Centre for Journalism and Public Ethics (CEPET), ARTICLE 19 Mexico, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and other associates. Look out for campaign activities, including an internal appeal for joint action over the coming weeks - your support will be crucial. For further information contact [campaigns@ifex.org](mailto:campaigns@ifex.org)

#### **MFWA and NAFEO launch campaign on The Gambia**

On 21 May, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and the Network of African Freedom of Expression Organisations (NAFEO) launched a campaign in Accra to end the impunity and violent attacks on media freedoms and freedom of expression in the Gambia by President Yahya Jammeh's government. For further information contact Kwame Karikari, Executive Director of MFWA, at: [mfa@africaonline.com.gh](mailto:mfa@africaonline.com.gh)

#### **ARTICLE 19/Index on Censorship condemn attacks on Zimbabwe Law Society**

ARTICLE 19's Zimbabwe branch and Index on Censorship condemned the attacks on several members of the Zimbabwean Law Society on 8 May. To see Beatrice Mtetwa's testimony of the incident and a copy of the petition for the release of the two imprisoned lawyers, click here: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/other/zimbabwe-lawyers-testimony-petition.pdf>

#### **IFEX members campaign for Chinese journalists**

- Reporters Without Borders (RSF) came together with 8 other international organisations to form the French Collectif Chine JO 2008, to announce an eight-point campaign to improve human rights in China, host of the Olympic Games in Beijing next year. Visit the blog at: <http://pekin2008.rsfblog.org>
- World Association of Newspapers (WAN) awards jailed Chinese journalist with the 2007 Golden Pen of Freedom. The award to Shi Tao, who was imprisoned after the American search engine company Yahoo provided information to the Chinese authorities that led to his arrest, was made on the 18th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. See: <http://www.wan-press.org/article14357.html>
- Human Rights Watch (HRW) urges the Chinese government to extend to Chinese domestic journalists the same reporting freedoms granted to foreign journalists and ensure that rights are upheld. See: <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2007/05/31/china16029.htm>

#### **The World Association of Newspapers (WAN) works to put press freedom higher on the agenda in Africa**

The World Association of Newspapers and the World Editors Forum, met at the 60th World Newspaper Congress and 14th World Editors Forum Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, from 3 to 6 June 2007 to strategise towards abolishing "insult laws" in Africa and setting free expression higher on the agenda. See the Declaration resulting from the congress: <http://www.wan-press.org/article14289.html>

## **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!!**

**Pakistan** (PPF): The Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) urges IFEX members to sign on the following letter in the face of an intense and rapidly deteriorating free expression situation in Pakistan, where media have been targeted, attacked, and harassed for their coverage of the protest campaign following the suspension of the country's Supreme Court Chief Justice. See the internal appeal at: [http://ifex.org/download/en/PPF\\_Pakistan\\_June07.doc](http://ifex.org/download/en/PPF_Pakistan_June07.doc). Please send your signatures to [campaigns@ifex.org](mailto:campaigns@ifex.org) with a copy to [ppf@pakistanpressfoundation.org](mailto:ppf@pakistanpressfoundation.org) before Friday June 15.

#### **Recent Joint Actions:**

**Uzbekistan** (Adil Soz): On 11 May, 23 IFEX members called for the full acquittal of Uzbek journalist and human rights activist Umida Niyazova in a joint action led by Adil Soz. The joint action was signed within 24 hours and sent to media organisations and European Union representatives before a strategic EU meeting on sanctions against Uzbekistan. See: <http://campaigns.ifex.org/en/index.html>

**Burma** (SEAPA): On 17 April, the Southeast Asia Press Alliance (SEAPA) led an internal appeal to support IFEX interim member Mizzima News, an independent news agency and human rights

monitoring group run by Burmese exiles, after the Indian authorities closed its office in New Delhi. Fourteen IFEX members responded within 24 hours, supporting the joint action and sending letters to the Indian authorities calling for an end to the closure. Mizzima staff members and supporters also held a peaceful demonstration outside the Municipal Council of Delhi offices, after which officials re-opened the office. During a 16 May visit to the IFEX Clearing House, Mizzima News editor-in-chief, Soe Myint, said: "It was remarkable how the information about our situation spread across the network. We appreciated the good and timely response we got from IFEX members and from government officials in Norway (via the European Union) and Australia. It was very effective."

## MEMBER ADVOCACY FOCUS

### **Human rights advocate confronts fear and intimidation in Egypt**

*As Executive Director of the Cairo-based Arabic Network for Human Rights Information and lawyer, Gamal Eid often finds himself campaigning for justice for imprisoned bloggers and journalists, including Al Jazeera reporter Huwaida Taha, who is appealing a six months jail sentence incurred as a result of a documentary on torture she filmed in Egypt. Then in May, Eid himself was threatened with five years in prison after a Judge filed a bogus lawsuit against him, citing "extortion". HRinfo's website, which houses information from 141 members in 18 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as well as IFEX's Arabic site, looked doomed for closure. Eid talked to Kristina Stockwood, IFEX Outreach Coordinator, about his case, free expression in the region in general, and why HRinfo will never give up the fight.*

**You recently feared you might go to jail for five years and HRinfo would be shut down after a judge launched a case against you. What would happen if this occurred?** The fear is still there - the judge's fabricated cases are still ongoing. We are also suffering from the bias of the public prosecution. No matter what the result may be, HRinfo will continue. Many colleagues are willing and capable of managing the network and ensuring its continuity. HRinfo will not shut down unless the police force us to do so. And even then we would still find a way to save the site and our more than 15,000 documents.

**What is the hardest aspect of your work?** Meeting the expectations of the victims of freedom of expression violations seeking HRinfo's support. In the face of continuing severe violations and the failure of the public prosecution to act, many victims are despairing. We have a real need for victories to give us hope.

Bloggers in Egypt and the Arab world are now facing widespread harassment that has made some stop writing all together and others so afraid of the authorities that they have asked us and other organisations to stop interfering. We are now looking into how to provide protection so that this situation does not further deteriorate.

**Why has the situation in Egypt worsened when it seemed to be improving in recent years?** The government is attempting to "normalise" the situation by undermining the limited freedom that the democratic movement and independent press in Egypt have achieved. It is also being vengeful towards the symbolic institutions that have persistently widened the margin of democracy in the past few years, such as judges, bloggers and some independent media outlets.

Violations in Egypt at this time are also related to impunity. That is why activists for democracy often find themselves in a tough and dangerous predicament. Since freedom of opinion and expression is the train on which democracy rides, those working in journalism and media are always the first victims to fall.

The worst Arab countries for freedom of opinion and expression violations are Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. Tunisia is one of the worst in terms of spreading misleading news and

prejudice in media throughout the region that promote it as a liberal and democratic country. The state of human rights in Egypt definitely has an impact on these other Arab countries, given the country's influence in the region. News, whether good or bad, travels fast in most countries - that is why the role of the press and human rights organisations are very important. Their resistance and struggle should mean that in turn they are able to help activists in other Arab countries.

**You have recently done trial monitoring in Syria. Do you think your attendance at the trial of dissident and journalist Michel Kilo influenced the decision to give him a lesser sentence than other activists had received?**

It is easy for the Syrian authorities to question or contest the objectivity of European or U.S. activists because they can paint it as a conspiracy against Syria. However, when the criticism comes from Egyptian activists and journalists, the effect is much stronger and the task of contesting or dismissing it much more difficult. This was very apparent when I was at the trial with colleagues, and the court decided to cancel Kilo's hearing on 7 May. [He was later sentenced on 13 May to three years in jail on charges of "weakening national sentiment" for signing a declaration in May 2006 calling for improved relations between Syria and Lebanon.]

**If regional groups got together to do one big campaign, what would it be? What tactics could they use?**

It is imperative that groups within the region cooperate more, because that would help affect Arab public opinion and expose non-democratic regimes. This should not contradict the roles of international organisations, who impact Western governments, which in turn can pressure Arab governments.

The main mission for regional groups should be to end the impunity that undermines freedom of the press, and to defend journalists' rights to criticise and write without fear of being prosecuted. Following that would be a focus on changing repressive laws. Campaigns defending journalists, writers and bloggers is one of the most important duties of these organisations, whether through demonstrations or sit-ins in front of embassies, sending letters to prisoners of opinion, uncovering the truth about the environment in these countries, as well as exposing lies that officials are asking us to believe.

**Web Links:**

- HRinfo (available in Arabic and English): <http://www.hrinfo.net/>
- IFEX Arabic information service (<http://www.hrinfo.net/ifex/>)
- HRinfo alert about blocking HRinfo, IFEX and other websites:  
<http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/83328/>
- Syrian dissidents' cases: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/83396/>
- IFEX Tunisia Monitoring Group (English): <http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg/>
- IFEX-TMG (French): <http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg/>
- Freedom House assessment of MENA press freedom:  
[http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/press\\_release/MENA\\_FTP\\_07.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/press_release/MENA_FTP_07.pdf)
- IFJ report on Middle East press freedom crisis:  
<http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Index=4967&Language=EN>

## Topics and Tools

### **Topics of Interest:**

#### **Debate on IFEX international advocacy priorities**

Nick Fillmore, a NGO development fundraiser, and founding member and former Executive Director of CJFE and the IFEX Clearing House, asks whether international media support groups have their advocacy priorities in place and if they are doing enough to support journalists. Rohan Jayasekera of Index on Censorship responds.

Article by Nick Fillmore: <http://www.indexonline.org/en/news/articles/2007/2/world-press-freedom-day-2007-what-are-the-re.shtml>

Response article by Rohan Jayasekera:

<http://www.indexonline.org/en/news/articles/2007/2/international-free-speech-groups-can-find-st.shtml>

### **Internet is 'new frontline' in war for human rights**

The Internet is the new frontline in the war for human rights as governments battle to stamp out online opposition voices, according to Amnesty International. "In an age of technology, the Internet has become the new frontier in the struggle for the right to dissent," said Amnesty International chief Irene Khan, in the foreword to the rights group's latest annual report. Governments in Belarus, China, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia are "monitoring chat rooms, deleting blogs, restricting search engines, and blocking Web sites" with the help of major global IT firms. For the full story see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGPOL100202007>

### **International groups join in urging Iran to lift travel bans on journalists**

The Iranian government should immediately release two Iranian-Americans from detention and clarify the case of a third who may have "disappeared," a group of leading human rights organisations said. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Federation for Human Rights, Reporters Without Borders and the Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi also urged Iran to lift travel bans on two journalists with dual nationality whom Iran has barred from traveling back to their home countries. See <http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGMDE130632007>

To sign the petitions see:

Free Haleh Campaign: <http://www.freehaleh.org/category/petition/>

Free Kian Campaign: <http://www.freekian.org/petition/>

### **AMARC produces alternative news on protests**

A radio show covering protests which took place in Rostock on the eve of the 33rd G8 Summit, in Heiligendamm, north east of Germany is streamed on <http://www.radioforum.fm> by groups Sheffield Live, UK, Bush Radio, South Africa, Tetsuo from Japan, and VOICES, Bangalore India, representing AMARC Europe, Africa and Asia Pacific. Duration: 48 minutes 7 seconds. Log on to <http://g8.amarc.org> to access audio files.

## **Advocacy Tools:**

### **ICT4Peace Foundation Launches New Website**

ICT4Peace looks at Information Communications Technology (ICT) and how it can be used in conflict resolution and peace-building. The project, established by the Swiss government, allows you to connect to a virtual community of likeminded people interested in using technology in humanitarian and peace operations. Check out the recently added news feed, or contribute to the latest webchat on journalist safety at: <http://www.ict4peace.org>

### ***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>