

Issue 9: July/August 2007

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	page 1
'ROAR' RAPID AND ORGANISED ACTION RESPONSE	page 1- 2
MEMBER ADVOCACY FOCUS	page 2-4
TOPICS AND TOOLS	page 4-5

IFEX CAMPAIGNS and ADVOCACY SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Campaigns/Advocacy at the IFEX General Meeting in Uruguay

The IFEX General Meeting (GM) is fast approaching, and plans for campaigning workshops and strategy-building are well underway. At the pre-GM Meetings in Toronto this past June 2007, full support was voiced by all 10 IFEX member organisations in attendance for the on-going development of the Campaigns and Advocacy Support Programme. Interest was expressed to advance advocacy support especially to Africa and Latin America over the upcoming period. A summary guidebook that overviews background of the programme, what IFEX has to offer members, and how member groups can become more involved and access services at the Clearing House will also be made available at the GM. Campaigning workshop sessions will be built into the draft GM programme, and if your organisation has ideas of what they would like to see included, drawing on existing campaigns work in process, please contact us at campaigns@ifex.org

Member Advocacy Highlights:

The Tunisia Monitoring Group (TMG) Welcomes Liberation of Mohamed Abbou

On Tuesday, 24 July, Tunisian dissident, writer and lawyer Mohamed Abbou was released from prison in Tunisia where he had been held since his arrest in March 2005. Abbou was sentenced to prison for three and half years for exposing torture in Tunisian prisons on the Internet. Members of the IFEX-TMG, who have been campaigning for his release - including trying to visit him in prison in March - joined the Observatory for Freedom of the Press, Publishing and Creation (Observatoire pour la liberté de presse, d'édition et de creation, OLPEC), and other rights groups in Tunisia in welcoming his release. See: <http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg/>

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ): European-wide Day of Action Planned in November

IFJ reports that tens of thousands of journalists are planning a coordinated day of protest in every European capital to highlight a dramatic media crisis over political pressure, falling standards and poor working conditions across Europe. See: <http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Index=5030&Language=EN>

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 if your organisation would like more information, or see:
<http://campaigns.ifex.org/en/about.html>

INTERNAL APPEALS FOR JOINT ACTION

Recent Joint Actions:

Mexico (CENCOS/Article 19/CEPET/AMARC): Four IFEX members issue pronouncement before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on freedom of expression situation. See <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/85018/>

Ethiopia (IFJ/MFWA/WAJA): Ahead of African Union summit, three IFEX members and other organisations launch campaign to get journalists out of jail. See <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/85025/>

United Kingdom (Article 19/Index on Censorship): Three free expression groups pressure incoming prime minister to defend threatened rights. See: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/84453/>

FOCUS ON MEMBER ADVOCACY

AFRICA: Campaigning momentum builds as IFEX members intensify advocacy efforts for free expression

By Yael Berger (CJFE/IFEX Intern) and Katie Meyer (IFEX Alerts/Outreach Coordinator)

Momentum is building around various campaigns across Africa as IFEX members step up the pressure against repressive governments. Their courageous work is aimed at ending the criminalisation of publication offenses that see editors and journalists receive threats to their safety, the closure of media outlets, legal battles and imprisonment.

"Beyond traditional state harassment of the media, internal (self) censorship motivated by commercial interests makes a sham of the independence of the press -- it is a major issue that journalists and advocates in African countries that are 'democratising' are also grappling with," says David Makali, Director of Kenya-based Media Initiative.

At the IFEX pre-GM in Toronto in June, members gave a strong endorsement for the IFEX Campaigns and Advocacy programme and prioritised support for campaigning and network development in Africa.

In an effort to foster greater involvement and collaboration in campaigning across the continent and to raise awareness, this issue of FOCUS highlights several IFEX member-led campaigns that are currently underway, particularly in the politically repressive states of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and The Gambia.

Glimmer of hope after long campaign for prisoners' freedom in Ethiopia

A collective sigh of relief went out over the IFEX network on 20 July, when news that four editors, Andualem Ayele, Mesfin Tesfaye, Wonakseged Zeleke and Dawit Fassil, along with other political prisoners in Ethiopia, were officially pardoned and released from prison after 21 months of confinement.

IFEX members in Africa and around the world have been campaigning for the release of political prisoners and journalists in Ethiopia since 2 November 2005 - the date of a protest by the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party, which led to a major crackdown by Prime Minister Meles Zenawai's government. Among the 38 individuals arrested for being

mouthpieces for the opposition and charged with treason and genocide, were 17 publishers and Kifle Mulat, the head of IFEX member the Ethiopian Free Journalists' Association (EFJA). Mulat was forced into exile as a result.

Despite the welcome news, the campaign for free expression in Ethiopia continues. Efforts are underway for two journalists in particular, Abey Gizaw and Zelalem Guebre, who remain in prison in poor conditions on similar charges.

On 29 June 2007, as part of the "African Journalists Out of Jail Campaign" the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), West African Journalists' Association and others launched an appeal for imprisoned journalists in Ethiopia, Eritrea, The Gambia and Zimbabwe - "the worst offenders of free expression on the continent." According to Gabriel Baglo, Director of IFJ's Africa Regional Office, "It was aimed at heads of states, political leaders, government officials, the judiciary, parliamentarians and all personalities who wield power that can free our colleagues in jail."

This campaign was born out of the IFJ African affiliate's regional meeting in Rabat, Morocco in September 2006, and is tied to the organisation's advocacy strategy against impunity. It aims to see imprisoned journalists freed and an end to policies and laws that put professional journalists behind bars.

Seeking justice and legal reform in The Gambia

The dismal free expression record in The Gambia is not going unnoticed thanks to the campaigning efforts of IFEX African and international members. The Network of African Freedom of Expression Organisations (NAFEO) and MFWA launched a multi-faceted campaign in May 2007 in response to continued repression of the independent press by the government, including the arrest and detention of journalists, the closure of media outlets and the banning of public meetings on free expression. Tension has been further heightened since the disappearance of Chief Ebrima Manneh, a journalist of the "Daily Observer", who was arrested on 11 July 2006. The government has recently denied detaining Manneh at all, though he was recently spotted in hospital under police custody and is rumoured to have been detained in various police stations throughout the country. His whereabouts are currently unknown.

By filing a lawsuit on Manneh's behalf against the Republic of Gambia at the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Nigeria, these groups are using the MFWA's Journalists' Legal Defense Programme to push for the immediate release of Manneh and appropriate compensation for his unlawful detainment.

In July, MFWA and NAFEO shone a bright light on President Yahya Jammeh's appalling record of disregard for the rights of journalists and critics with the publication of a book on The Gambia during his time in office, between 1994 and 2006.

The campaign also picked up momentum ahead of the African Union (AU) heads of state summit on 25 to 27 June 2007. NAFEO members in attendance, including Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Journaliste en Danger (JED) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), along with other organisations including ARTICLE 19 and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, drew up an African Treaty on free expression and also mobilised support for advocacy in the Gambia.

As Prof. Kwame Karikari, Director of MFWA, points out, "If you protest a law and don't reform it, nothing will change. So we have recently begun a legal reform programme aimed at changing laws that are detrimental to press freedom and freedom of expression in general. . .[and] advocating at the level of the AU for the establishment of press freedom treaties."

Planning for next NAFEO meeting, scheduled for September 2007, is currently underway. Please contact mfwa@africaonline.com.gh for details or to support this initiative.

Cries from Table Mountain: African free press campaign tops the WAN Congress agenda

On 4 June 2007, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) kicked off the 60th World Newspaper Congress and the 14th World Editors Forum in Cape Town, South Africa. Making this event their first annual meeting in Africa, WAN took the opportunity to present the *Declaration of Table Mountain* - a call to action for all African states to uphold freedom of the press and the independent media. As part of this long-term campaign, WAN plans to present the Declaration to the UN General Assembly, UNESCO and the African Union, in the hopes of seeing changes leading to a democratic and pluralistic media within the next ten years.

"By persistently and courageously denouncing violations of press freedom, local African free expression organisations are at the very heart of the campaign," says Virginie Jouan, WAN's Co-Director of Press Freedom and Development. The campaign is calling on African governments to abolish 'insult' and criminal defamation laws where they are in force, and all other laws that restrict press freedom. "Press freedom remains instrumental in the fight against corruption, famine, poverty, violent conflict, disease, and lack of education," says WAN.

The organisation is working with various IFEX members, including Reporters sans Frontières, the International Press Institute, the Committee to Protect Journalists, International PEN, IFJ and Article 19, and is currently preparing a set of possible joint initiatives, events, and missions as well as the launch of a website dedicated to the campaign.

Propelling advocacy strategies forward: collaboration and awareness-raising

IFEX members are demonstrating their strong commitment to building a vibrant free press and free expression environment across Africa through growing local and international campaigning strategies. In East Africa, the Media Initiative has revived its monitoring and advocacy functions and is in the throes of organising the Africa Editor's Forum General Meeting, hosted by the Kenya Editor's Guild, to be held at the end of October 2007. Free expression and advocacy for Ethiopia, Eritrea and Zimbabwe are to be a focus of the conference. Contact David Makali (mediainst@wananchi.com) for information or to assist in this initiative.

The IFEX Clearing house is eager to support campaigning efforts in Africa by assisting members in collaborating, strengthening African free expression groups and building international public awareness.

For more information please contact Katie Meyer, Alerts/Outreach Coordinator responsible for programming in Africa at meyer@ifex.org.

TOPICS AND TOOLS

Topics of Interest:

AMARC and ARTICLE 19 Call on Inter-American Commission to Address Problems of Broadcast Regulation in the Americas

On 18 July 2007 AMARC, ARTICLE 19 and the Legal and Social Studies Center (CELS) participated in a hearing before the IACHR on the subject of broadcast regulation. The purpose of the hearing was to highlight the implications of international and regional standards on freedom of expression for broadcast regulation, as well as serious failures within the Americas to respect those standards. The Submission is available at:

<http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/broadcasting-regs.pdf>

The Pretense of Professionalism - the Flipside of Media Freedom in Sri Lanka

While attention is concentrated on the growing challenges to free media - and rightly so given the growing repression and censorship - less attention is paid to the unprofessional conduct of media that ignore the rights of readers and contributors and exacerbate significant problems facing the development of professional media in Sri Lanka. For the full article, see:

<http://www.groundviews.org/2007/07/01/the-pretense-of-professionalism-the-flipside-of-media-freedom-in-sri-lanka/>

Press Emblem Campaign (PEC) makes statement following the safe release of Alan Johnston: NEVER AGAIN AN EXPLOSIVE BELT TIED TO THE BODY OF A JOURNALIST

The PEC reiterated its call to the Human Rights Council (HRC) to hold a special session in September on the core issue of protection of journalists, which would lead to an open-ended working group to deliberate on a new convention for the protection of media in zones of conflict and in dangerous situation. The Geneva-based NGO will start parallel talks with the International Labor Office (ILO) to find ways and means of how to move towards a new convention for the safety of workers in conflict zones. To read the statement by PEC, see:

<http://www.presseblem.ch/10399.html>

Websites of Interest

Prometheus Radio Project

Prometheus Radio Project has played a key role in the struggle to get licenses for community radio stations in the United States, with the conviction that a free, diverse, and democratic media is critical to the political and cultural health of nations. In face of homogenisation, and restrictions in the media landscape, Prometheus works to foster easy access to media outlets and a broad selection of cultural and informative media resources. Prometheus practices a mixture of research, advocacy, activism and direct services to organisations that want to start neighbourhood radio stations. http://www.prometheusradio.org/take_action/lpfm_in_congress

Advocacy Tools:

A New Guide for Bloggers and Online Journalism

The guide is short and simple and aims at helping new bloggers who desire to work as citizen journalists on the Internet. The 10-page guide is entitled "Ten Steps towards Citizen Journalism on the Internet" and it contains advice in addition to a definition of citizen journalism and bloggers' rights. To read the full guide, see: <http://www.openarab.net/faq/2007/icfj.shtml>

Launch of ICT4Peace: An International Process for Crisis Management

The ICT4Peace Foundation announced the launch of ICT4Peace: An International Process for Crisis Management, and ICT technology that "can facilitate effective and sustained communication between peoples, communities and stakeholders involved in crisis management, humanitarian aid and peace-building". See 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 or see <http://campaigns.ifex.org/en/index.html>