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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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## **FOCUS ON MEMBER ADVOCACY**

### **From the symbols to the streets, campaigning gets creative in Central Asia**

By Zaynah Khanbhai, IFEX Outreach Coordinator

Cartoonists and writers are raising awareness of free expression issues in Central Asia this week by competing in essay and caricature contests launched by IFEX members and partners in the region to commemorate World Press Freedom Day.

The third annual contest is part of an advocacy strategy by free expression organisations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that has actually revived the disappearing art of editorial cartooning.

“Editorial cartoons play an important role in public debate but they have been disappearing from newspaper pages across Central Asia in recent years, as publishers and cartoonists have feared reprisals such as intimidation and harassment for publishing them,” says Tamara Kaleyeva, Executive Director of Kazakhstan-based IFEX member Adil Soz. “We launched this campaign to celebrate political cartooning and its role in the political arena.”

Free expression organisations including Adil Soz, Public Association of Journalists in Kyrgyzstan, National Association of Independent Media in Tajikistan and Batken Media Resource Centre in Kyrgyzstan have collaborated to make the essay-writing and cartooning campaign regional in scope. The contests are judged at the regional level by appointed panels and the works of the winners are published in calendars and journals that are widely distributed.

These groups have also used other creative tactics to raise media and public awareness about free expression issues in their respective countries, as well as to create solidarity across the media communities. Last year, in a symbolic gesture to demonstrate the deteriorating state of free expression, they planted cacti. The previous year, Adil Soz and partners in Kazakhstan planted oak trees dedicated to the “Solidarity of Journalists” to speak to journalists about the need to unite to promote the right to freedom of expression.

In Central Asia, overt protests and demonstrations are the least common form of activism. Civil society organizations almost never appear on the streets for fear of the repercussions associated with direct forms of activism.

However, Adil Soz and its local partners in Kazakhstan have recently shown their readiness and courage to use more direct advocacy tactics.

On 10 March 2009, free expression activists demonstrated in front of the City Court in the capital city Almaty to protest the exorbitant fine of 300 000 000 tenge (approx. \$1,989,700 USD) imposed on journalist Almas Kusherbayev for moral defamation. The fine is the highest ever brought against a journalist or media house in Kazakhstan. Kusherbayev was fined following complaints brought forward by a Member of Parliament after he wrote an article about the causes behind increasing grain prices in the country.

The brave and unorthodox decision to organise the protest was the result of a meeting between newspaper editors and free expression organisations, including Adil Soz, who were concerned by the rising trend of moral defamation cases being brought against journalists and thought it necessary and urgent to take a more direct form of action.

Despite the knowledge that they would likely go to jail for their outspoken advocacy, and against the orders of their legal advisors, Adil Soz spoke out for the rights of this journalist while surrounded by armed national security troops. The organisation also raised international attention to the case by issuing an alert through the IFEX Action Alerts Network.

Concerted media coverage combined with the organisers' effective mobilisation of stakeholders including intergovernmental bodies, politicians and all prominent media houses, ensured that the armed forces could not take action against the protesters and contributed to the event's success.

Beyond raising public attention and awareness of the issue in Kazakhstan locally, regionally, and internationally, the campaign also played a role in strengthening journalists' solidarity around free expression rights.

The organisers collectively commented on the determination they felt to bring about change through protests, "...we might be losers in terms of official law but we will be winners in the long run, because we crossed the barrier that made us fear justice and real freedom and nothing will stop us now."

- Click [here](#) to read the Adil Soz alert on the Kusherbayev case

## CAMPAIGNS and ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS



**CAMPAIGN AT THE GLOBAL FORUM!**

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**[Azerbaijan \(IRFS\): Fourth anniversary of murder of Elmar Huseynov observed:](#)** On 2 March, journalists and representatives from journalism organisations, the diplomatic corps and civil society, including the Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety (IRFS), visited the grave of Elmar Huseynov, editor-in-chief of the "Monitor Journal", to commemorate the fourth anniversary of his murder. The perpetrators of the crime have yet to be found. Over 100 people participated in the event.

**[Bahrain: BCHR launches YouTube channel:](#)** The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) recently launched its YouTube channel, setting an important precedent for other advocacy groups. The channel features over 70 videos that call attention to political and human rights developments in Bahrain. The channel received more than 1,500 views in its first two months and provides a public forum for discussion of current affairs and human rights issues.

**Bahrain: IFEX Members' trial monitoring and lobbying leads to freedom for rights defenders:**

IFEX members, led by the BCHR and Human Rights Watch, organised trial monitoring for two ongoing cases of free expression violations. On 11 March, Abdul Hadi Al-Khawaja, former president of BCHR, was in court on charges of "instigating hatred and disrespect" for a speech he made criticising the government. Front Line monitored the trial on behalf of Human Rights Watch. In the 24 March trial against human rights activists Abduljalil Alsingace, Hasan Mushaima and Mohamed Habib Al-Muqdad, representatives of BCHR and Human Rights Watch, along with Amnesty International, attended a court hearing on charges related to their publishing and political activities.

According to trial monitor Nabeel Rajab of BCHR, "The lawyers and local monitors think that this [international] presence positively influenced the mood and tolerance of the Judiciary, the events and the outcome of the hearing." In April, the King pardoned 178 activists, who were released from jail. Charges in the above cases were dropped. These IFEX members, including ARTICLE 19, also lobbied the Bahrain government and cited these actions as instrumental to the pardon.

**Bangladesh: ARTICLE 19 and partners launch Right To Information (RTI) campaign:** On 14 April, the "Information is Power" campaign was launched to promote the new RTI Law in Bangladesh. It features local level activities such as debates on right to information issues by school and college students, workshops and meetings with public officials, and rickshaw parades in district towns displaying messages and slogans such as "Information is Power" and "Free information is the key to development".

**Brazil: IAPA calls for action on unpunished murder of Brazilian journalist:** After more than a decade of legal inaction regarding the killing of Reinaldo Coutinho da Silva, editor of the *Cachoeiras Jornal*, the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) has submitted the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). Through ads published in some 400 newspapers, IAPA invites readers to go to the website <http://www.impunidad.com> and join its campaign entitled "Let's Put an End to Impunity." The initiative has received the support of nearly 20,000 signatories to a letter which is sent each month to the authorities demanding greater effort in police and judicial inquiries and harsh punishment for the guilty.

**Egypt: Three IFEX Members mark centenary of Press Freedom Demonstrations:**

Approximately 100 journalists, human rights activists and media workers participated in a public symposium to mark the "100th Anniversary of Press Freedom Demonstrations in Egypt 1909" on 30 March in Cairo. The event was organised by the three Egyptian members of IFEX, the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) and the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR). Participants raised attention about the current state of freedom of expression, drawing inspiration from the heroic struggle of past Egyptian journalists in their bid to secure press freedom. The groups say the free press situation "has deteriorated from what it was a hundred years ago." EOHR launched a report to coincide with the anniversary, which can be accessed here in [English](#) and in [Arabic](#).

**South East Asia (SEAPA, ARTICLE 19): Legislators create ASEAN caucus to protect free expression:** A group of ASEAN legislators gathered in Cha-am, Thailand on 28 February to announce the formation of an ASEAN Legislative Caucus on Rights and Free Expression, with the aim of protecting and promoting democracy, human rights and free expression in the ASEAN Community. This is a new step towards addressing free expression rights in the region, however, ARTICLE 19 points out that the draft proposal for the human rights body lacks powers to investigate or prosecute rights abusers and contains provisions that reject external interference.

**Philippines: SEAPA Mission to Philippines challenges President Arroyo on killing of journalists:**

Four years to the day that whistleblower-turned-journalist Marlene Garcia-Esperat was murdered for exposing government corruption, media advocates from the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) converged in Manila to confront President Arroyo's administration on the growing level of impunity for the killers of journalists. The mission released a joint declaration that stated: "the culture of impunity that is deeply-rooted in the Philippines could be replicated in other countries

in the region unless there is a common effort to dismantle it." The mission welcomed the creation of police tracker teams to locate and detain suspects but stressed that "only a demonstration of the efficacy of the justice system in resolving crimes like the killing of Esperat can help put an end to the killing of journalists."

**World Association of Newspapers (WAN): Advocacy campaigns encourage youth engagement in free expression issues:** WAN is engaging young people in the defence of press freedom through several advocacy initiatives that encourage teachers to make sure that young people understand the importance of, and threats to, press freedom. Initiatives include the creation of a Facebook group called "Show Your Face to Free Shi Tao" where users are encouraged to download posters of the jailed Chinese journalist and then upload photos of themselves posing with it. The World Young Reader Prize, an annual award from WAN to recognise newspapers that do the most to develop young readership, has also added a press freedom category to honour newspapers that teach effectively about the fragility and importance of press freedom in a democratic society.

## **TAKE ACTION**

**Burma: The Arrest Yourself 2009 campaign:** In an effort to show solidarity with Aung San Suu Kyi, the imprisoned democracy leader, and all political prisoners in Burma, the group US Campaign for Burma is urging individuals to stage self-imposed "house arrests" for 24 hours sometime before 19 June. The host is asked to invite people to the event and hold a party to raise awareness of the imprisoned leader and the situation in Burma. The group is offering to send event organisers a variety of campaign tools and educational materials. Participants can sign up for Arrest Yourself 2009 [here](#).

**Iran: CPJ petition for the release of journalist from Evin prison:** Join the appeal for freelance journalist Roxana Saberi, who has been detained since January and was sentenced to eight years in jail for "espionage" on 18 April. More than 10,000 people worldwide have signed a [CPJ petition](#) urging that Saberi receive due process and be released as quickly as possible. CPJ presented the petition to the Islamic Republic of Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York in March. The U.S. State Department has also sought Saberi's release.

**North Korea: RSF helps launch petitions for the release of jailed journalists:** Reporters sans frontières (RSF) has launched petitions along with the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) for the immediate and unconditional release of reporters Laura Ling and Euna Lee, who have been held in North Korea since 17 March. They were taken into custody on the Chinese-North Korean border while reporting on the fate of North Korean refugees and human trafficking. Sign the petition [here](#).

**Turkey: BIANET calls attention to campaign for journalist sentenced to 10 years in prison:** A group of prominent activists have started a campaign against the 10-year prison sentence handed down to politician Leyla Zana in December 2008. In the absence of her lawyer, the court found Zana guilty of "being a member of a terrorist organisation" and deprived her of the right to vote and be elected. Speaking at a press briefing in Istanbul on 16 March, the group called on the Supreme Court of Appeals to overturn the sentence and the Turkish Parliament to lift all legal obstructions to freedom of expression in the name of democracy. Support their campaign and sign the petition at: <http://leyla-zana.blogspot.com>

## **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. Organise an "internal

appeal” to fellow IFEX members calling for solidarity and joint action in support of your campaign by writing to: [campaigns@ifex.org](mailto:campaigns@ifex.org).

## **INTERNAL APPEALS**

**Your signature is needed – look out for Internal Appeals from IFEX members and sign on!**

## **JOINT ACTIONS**

**[Iran \(CPJ\) – 23 April](#)**: IFEX members call for journalist Roxana Saberi's release on bail and right to a free and fair appeal of eight-year prison sentence

**[International \(ARTICLE 19, CIHRS, Human Rights Watch\) - 20 April](#)**: IFEX members and other rights group urged states to participate in the UN World Conference Against Racism (Durban Review conference)

**[Moldova \(IJC\) – 14 April](#)**: Twenty-five IFEX members and 10 other organisations protested violations of access to information rights and attacks on journalists following legislative election.

**[Thailand \(ARTICLE 19/Index on Censorship\) - 6 April](#)**: Routine use of lèse majesté to silence dissent condemned as blogger Suwicha Thakhor sentenced to 10 years in prison.

**[Russia \(Freedom House/Human Rights Watch\) - 1 April](#)**: President Obama lobbied to address attacks on activists during talks with President Medvedev.

**[Nepal \(ARTICLE 19/FNJ\) - 1 April 2009](#)**: Concern expressed over government's adoption of regressive film regulation.

**[International \(ARTICLE 19/CIHRS\) - 30 March](#)**: UN Human Rights Council resolution on "Defamation of Religions" condemned.

**[International \(Freedom House\) - 25 March](#)**: Twenty-seven IFEX members joined numerous other organisations in urging UN Human Rights Council members to reject "Defamation of Religions" resolution.

**[Philippines \(AJI/CIJ/TJA/SEAPA\) - 24 March](#)**: On fourth anniversary of journalist Marlene Esperat's death, press freedom mission challenged President Arroyo on the killing of journalists.

**[Mexico \(ARTICLE 19, RSF, AMARC\) - 19 March](#)**: Mexican organisations denounced criminal prosecution of community radio station Tierra y Libertad.

**[Sri Lanka \(ARTICLE 19/IFJ/IPI/WAN\) - 13 March](#)**: Call to UN to investigate press freedom violations; former chairman of government-owned broadcaster kidnapped.

**[Sri Lanka \(ARTICLE 19/CPJ/IFJ/IPI/RSF/WAN\) – 6 March](#)**: International press freedom groups called for release of journalist J.S. Tissainayagam.

**[Click here for a complete list of IFEX joint actions](#)**

## **TOPICS and TOOLS**

### **ARTICLES OF INTEREST**

**[Moldova: Twitter-mobilised protests force election re-count; organiser in hiding](#)**

The woman behind the mass protests which rocked the capital of Moldova in mid-April went into hiding after the so-called "Twitter revolution" forced a recount of the general election. Natalia Morar, 25, a Moldovan who has already been banned from Russia for opposing the Kremlin, told *The Guardian* she feared arrest after organising a demonstration which ended with 20,000 people storming the parliament building. The protests began after a conversation between Morar and six friends in a café in Chisinau, Moldova's capital, on Monday 6 April. "We decided to organise a flash mob for the same day using Twitter, as well as networking sites and SMS." With no recent history of mass protests in Moldova, "we expected at the most a couple of hundred friends, friends of friends, and colleagues," she said. "When we went to the square, there were 20,000 people waiting there. It was unbelievable."(From [EJC.net](#))

## ADVOCACY TOOLS

**[New Tactics in Human Rights](#):** The New Tactics in Human Rights Project, led by a diverse group of partner international organisations, advisors and practitioners, promotes tactical innovation and strategic thinking within the international human rights community. Their Resources and Tools page provides a variety of materials on strategy and tactics for human rights work, including the New Tactics Workbook and a useful training tools section.

**[OneWorldTV](#)** is a unique public platform for filmmakers, video journalists, NGOs and anyone with an interest in video and a concern for a better world. This global online community has been set up to share experiences, open debates and expand the horizons of audio-visual communications. OneWorldTV is an extension of [OneWorld.net](#), an online civil society network, supporting people's media to help build a more just global society.

**Campaigns Training (India):** New Delhi-based NGO [Lead the Action](#) is hosting a three-day training from 19-21 May 2009 on "Campaigning for Change" for development professionals. The training is specifically aimed at building institutional and individual capacities in designing meaningful social campaigns to bring about social change. For details on training please contact [rebika@leadtheaction.com](mailto:rebika@leadtheaction.com).

## CALL TO IFEX MEMBERS

- **Want to start a campaign and need advice or support?**
- **Increase the international profile of your organisation's campaigning efforts**
- **Share articles, websites and campaigns and advocacy tools**

Contact the IFEX campaigns programme at: [campaigns@ifex.org](mailto:campaigns@ifex.org)