

# XIX

## ARTICLE 19

### Around Africa April 2008

April 2008 was an action packed month around Africa. **Zimbabwe** commemorated 28 years of independence in April. Zimbabweans and their friends around Africa and the world who had expected the April commemoration would re-launch Zimbabwe's right to self-determination implied by democratic elections had to think again. The daily ritual of following the March election results in the news was often followed by dismay that Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF government led by President Robert Mugabe continued to dig in against standards of election management and freedom of expression. Meanwhile there have been reports of state sponsored violence against electoral commissioners and media professionals indicating campaign of intimidation was afoot. A recount of Parliamentary elections showed the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has definitely wrested legislative control from ZANU-PF. Meanwhile a run-off election appears necessary to decide the Presidential leadership. ARTICLE19 urges the MDC and President Mugabe's ZANU-PF to avoid violence and settle the election dispute based on the rule of law.

#### **Improved Working Conditions for Algerian Journalists**

ARTICLE 19 would like to welcome the adoption of a decree in **Algeria** aimed at defining labour relations between journalists and their media employers. The decree is seen as a major step towards improving the working conditions of media professionals. It provides journalists in both private and public media with a progressive legal framework that defines their profession and guarantees basic rights. We would like to welcome too an agreement made by the Sudanese government to end censorship after journalist union leader brought together a group of newspaper editors in a concerted effort to strengthen ethical journalism and media independence in Sudan.

#### **Advocating Media Freedom**

Across Africa media professional continue to face abuses and violations of their right to work in their chosen field. Despite on-going advocacy efforts to improve tolerance human rights, restrictions on freedom of expression are multiplying in most of African countries with a campaign of fear and intimidation against journalists and other information and human rights defenders. Assassinations are inadequately investigated, journalists' are imprisoned willy-nilly; newspapers are banned at a moment's notice or the radio stations are shut down at the whim of the authorities with war-torn **Somalia** listed as one of the most dangerous places for journalists. Nevertheless, some media advocacy and policy development efforts are bearing fruit.

ARTICLE19 commends the Press Union of Liberia's (PUL) campaign to reform the country's media laws. The union and other groups, supported by ARTICLE 19's partner **International Media Support**, submitted three media bills to the National Legislature of **Liberia**. The media bills which concur with international standards for freedom of expression will present a large step toward the post-conflict development within the country if passed. The draft laws can be found here: [Draft Public Broadcasting Service](#), [Draft Freedom of information Act](#), [Draft Independent Broadcasting Regulator](#).

ARTICLE19 welcomes the release of five Somali radio employees and the restoration of their broadcast service back on air. Likewise in **Tunisia**, where a comedian who was jailed for

imitating President Ben Ali was been released after serving a two month 'detention

Despite these clear improvements, which we want to greet, there have been a lot of violations. No convictions have been obtained in five journalist murders. They include the slayings of radio journalists Mahad Ahmed Elmi and Ali Sharmarke, who were killed within hours of each other on August 11, 2007.

### **Censorship and Attacks on Media**

Attacks against journalists were, again, rife this month across the continent. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, a journalist was beaten by an Angolan diplomat, whilst in **Zambia**, a senior reporter Kaiko Namusa, from the state-owned newspaper *Times of Zambia*, was assaulted and detained for over an hour at the Chipata Central Police station for photographing police officers manhandling a cyclist for allegedly breaking traffic rules. Such harassment of the media in Zambia occurring more frequently; ARTICLE 19 condemns this intimidation of the press, **Zambian** security forces should not allow assaults on journalists to become a trend in the country.

Foreign journalists have been targeted in **Zimbabwe** in April, where the New York Times correspondent Barry Bearak, in Zimbabwe to cover the elections, was detained with a British national for five days on charges of reporting without accreditation. ARTICLE 19 are deeply concerned about reports Zimbabwean authorities have detained other foreign correspondents; a freelance journalist Frank Chikowore was arrested in Harare though he was a duly accredited journalist with the Media and Information Commission, as required by the repressive Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). The chain of recent arrests confirms that journalists in Zimbabwe have come under heavy scrutiny during and after the elections. **ARTICLE 19** in April urged Zimbabwe's government to heed the calls of Zimbabweans, the 2008 first extra-ordinary SADC summit of Heads of State and Government, and the international community "*to comply with the rule of law and SADC Principles and Guidelines governing democratic elections*".

In April, in **Malawi**, a journalist Maxwell Ng'ambi was arrested by police on suspicion that he intended to interview a former speaker of parliament and cabinet minister, Sam Mpasu, from prison without permission to do so. The police also detained another journalist when enquiring about the arrest of his colleague. These arrests increased the total number of journalists arrested in Malawi in 2008 to **five**. **Uganda** has also seen **three** and **Somalia 4** journalists arrested this month

In April, in **Gabon**, we condemns the beating of cameraman Claude Aba Mboula of privately-owned TV station *Télé Africa* by police when filming police violence during a street protest against cost of living increases in Libreville on 25 April 2008. The press freedom organisation said. "*The Gabonese authorities must carry out an investigation into the attack on Mboula and punish the police officers responsible.*"

Neither the attack on Moussadji nor any other case of police violence against journalists has been punished or condemned by the **National Council for Communication**, which regulates the broadcast media. Article 95 of the Gabonese Constitution charges the council with the responsibility of ensuring respect of '*freedom of the press in all that which arises in the territory*'.

ARTICLE 19 condemns the closure of the private radio stations in **Niger** and **Somalia**. Since 1 April in **Egypt** Nilesat has blocked the transmission of *Alhewar* TV satellite, a station known for its credibility, courageous and critical coverage including on social and political issues. In February too, Nilesat had blocked the transmission of *Al-zawraa* and *Al baraka*

stations, in opposition with the article 32 of the Arab Charter that guarantee the right to expression.

### **Violation of Freedom of Expression**

Two renowned musicians in **Cameroon**, Lapiro de Mbanga and Joe La Conscience have been arrested and detained by the authorities in Cameroon for singing songs in which they criticised the recent controversial constitutional amendments which allow the President unlimited terms of office. We are deeply concerned about the repression of artistic expression in particular and free expression in general in Cameroon. We encourage supporters of free expression to send letters of protest and demand the release of the two musicians.

### **Policy Advocacy in Sudan**

**ARTICLE 19's** Africa Programme conducted a mission to **Sudan** in April and found continued disturbing reports of pre- and post-censorship of the print press in Khartoum. Sudanese security forces are still making daily visits to media houses and censoring taboo issues such as the conflict in Darfur and politics between Sudan's neighbour Chad. **ARTICLE 19** remains concerned over National media law reform in Sudan with suggestions only amendments to the existing draconian **Press Law** would be made at this stage, instead of repealing such legislation in place of new legislation protecting freedom of the press according to international best practice. Hence, **ARTICLE 19** urges respect of international standards for freedom of expression and the press in any amendments to media laws.