



Around Africa

May 2008

In spite of the World Press Freedom Day celebrations taking place in May, new and continued outbreaks of violence and political crises in Africa have posed serious threats to freedom of expression in the continent. Whilst the crisis posed by the recent elections in Zimbabwe continues into May, the conflict in Darfur, Sudan, impacted on the capital Khartoum, and South Africa, often considered a model country for development in Africa, witnessed an eruption of xenophobic rioting this month. Each of these incidents has impacted on freedom of expression including, though not exclusively press freedoms.

The World Press Freedom Day 2008

World Press Freedom Day is celebrated worldwide every year on **3 May**. It is an opportunity to celebrate the **fundamental principles for press freedom**; to evaluate press freedom, to defend the media from attacks on their independence and to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty. It is an occasion to inform the public of violations of the right to freedom of expression and as a reminder that many journalists brave death or imprisonment to inform the public. This day has been the occasion for many demonstrations throughout Africa, where freedom of expression has been seriously defied. This year concerned West Africans called for the release of the Nigerian journalist, **Moussa Kaka**, who was arrested on 20 September 2007 and charged with “complicity in a conspiracy against authority”.

Celebrations were also held in **Juba and in Khartoum in Sudan**, led by our partners both Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environmental Development (KCHRED) and Association for Media Development in Southern Sudan (AMDISS) on behalf of the consortium promoting the development of democratic media legislation in Sudan, of which **ARTICLE 19** is an implementing member. The consortium is working for the immediate enactment of democratic media legislation and for the promotion of freedom of expression in Sudan. A member of the project’s roundtable task force, **Rebecca Okwaci**, also presented a statement recently on women’s contributions in Sudan in achieving peace and security, to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight. Okwaci is one of Southern Sudan’s leading radio journalists and a women’s rights activist. **ARTICLE 19** paid homage to her on [International Women’s Day](#) on the 8 March 2007; in celebration of woman journalists around the world.

Consultative Stakeholders Meeting

From 26 to 28 May the Sudan project Consortium members participated in a **Consultative stakeholders meeting** in Juba, Sudan, which was convened by the Minister for Information on Draft Media Laws for South Sudan. The meeting brought together over 70 participants drawn from the ten states of South Sudan, Members of the Legislative Assembly, the Academia, Civil Society and even the Military (SPLA). **ARTICLE 19** was represented by John Gachie, Sudan Programme Officer and Sejal Parmar, Senior Legal Officer. **ARTICLE 19** was invited as the professional and technical team to; critic, review and revise the draft media bills on Public Service Broadcasting, Freedom of Information, Independent Broadcasting Authority and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Establishment bill. **ARTICLE 19 provided the legal and professional support** in the eventual production of a stake holders revised drafts that will be presented to the Cabinet in South Sudan after re-drafting by the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs before they are placed for debate and hopefully adoption by the South Sudan Legislative Assembly in August this year.

Zimbabwe Election Crisis

Whilst a degree of progress has been made in some African countries such as **Mauritania**, ARTICLE 19 regrets to see the respect of fundamental right to freedom of expression, as enshrined in **Article 9** of the **African Charter for Human and People's Rights** and Article 19 of the ICCPR, is worsening elsewhere. In **Zimbabwe**, the situation is alarming, while the Zimbabwean electoral commission announced that the run-off will take place on the **27 June**, armed men intercepted and burnt media vehicle carrying newspapers, and beat the driver and the assistant. We condemn the continuing use of violence against the independent press after **60,000** copies of *The Zimbabwean on Sunday* newspaper were intercepted and torched on the evening of 24 May 2008, and a freelance reporter was attacked and beaten in the eastern city of Mutare. These attacks on the independent press, carried out by unidentified armed men, cannot continue to be ignored. Moreover, since the 29 March general elections the authorities have been guilty of **at least 12 human rights violations** in the form of physical attacks and arbitrary arrests of journalists. More recently, on the 1 May a freelance journalist **Precious Shumba** was arrested during a police raid in the Harare office of the international aid NGO Action Aid, where he works as a program officer. Shumba is the 10th journalist to be arrested since the general elections.

ARTICLE 19 has issued a statement expressing its concern about this prevailing atmosphere in which a Zimbabwean run-off election is to take place. ARTICLE 19 Executive Director, Dr Agnes Callamard said: "*The burden is on the ruling party to guarantee freedom of expression for all sides in this important process*". To see the full statement follow this link:

<http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/zimbabwe-run-off-election.pdf>

Censorship and Attacks on Media

Zimbabwe is only one in a number of countries in Africa where journalists have been arrested or harassed in May. In **Nigeria**, about a dozen armed, plain-clothed policemen from the Niger State Command raided the head office of *Leadership* newspaper in Abuja, arresting the newspaper's deputy editor, **Danladi Ndayebo**, over a feature article published by the paper. Whilst in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, Austere Malivika Yalala, a journalist with Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise's (RTNC) and correspondent for the South Africa-based Radio Canal Afrique, received a death threat. The caller, who introduced himself as Captain Ndaliko of the Congolese Party of Resistance (PARECO, an armed group based in eastern RD Congo), said: "I will kill you before the International Criminal Court arrests us." Over the last **15 years**, approximately **500 journalists** have been murdered in direct relation to their work. Justice is served in less than 15 percent of these murder cases.

In **Sierra Leone**, *Unity Radio*, a station run by Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), was shut down on the orders of the Minister of Information and Communication, Alhaji Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, due to the installation of an illegal antenna. ARTICLE 19 urges Kargbo to reconsider the decision, with less than two months to go to local elections in what appears to be a move to deprive an opposition party of its main means of expression. Other attempts to muzzle the media this month for their criticism of political figures, have occurred in **Guinea (Conakry), Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe**.

ARTICLE 19 is once again drawing attention to the deteriorating press freedom situation in **The Gambia** and **Niger**, where serious freedom of expression and press freedom violations continue. The regime of President Yahya Jammeh has for the past 13 years systematically repressed the media in **The Gambia**, forcing several journalists to flee the country for fear of their safety. **Niger** also is experiencing state repression of the media. Since a Tuareg led armed conflict broke out last year in the Northern part of the country, there have been continuous press freedom violations. Media institutions and journalists attempting to report on the rebellion are subjected to suspensions, arbitrary detentions, intimidations, threats and shutdown.

ARTICLE 19 is also alarmed by the increasingly fraught climate for the press in **Rwanda**, in particular the expulsion of three newspaper editors from a 2 May 2008 World Press Freedom Day ceremony on the orders of the new Information Minister, Louise Mushikiwabo.

Freedom of Expression in Sudan

In May in Sudan, local civil society also released a statement after the worrying events at the beginning of the month in **Omdurman**, a district bordering Khartoum. The statement reminded Sudanese authorities that the events should not be used to create a state of fear among citizens, nor an excuse to deprive the people of their rights, including the right to freedom of expression. The National Intelligence and Security Service, in the same month closed the Sudanese independent daily newspaper Alwan for an indefinite period and the charge of "violating state security" brought against its editor, **Hussein Khogali**.

ARTICLE 19 welcomes the release of Sudanese al-Jazeera cameraman **Sami al-Haj**, who was held in **Guantanamo Bay Naval Base** without charge or trial by U.S. forces for more than six years. He was detained in December 2001 by Pakistani forces while covering the U.S. led-offensive to unseat the Taliban and later transported by the U.S. military to Guantanamo in June 2002. We also welcome the release of freelance journalist **Al-Ghali Yahya Shegifat** in **Sudan**, who was detained incommunicado since 14 May 2008. Neither his family nor his lawyer had been able to contact him and the charges against him are unknown since the arrest.

Defamation

ARTICLE 19 remains deeply concerned about of the use of insult laws we continue our support of campaigns for the abolition of criminal defamation legislation worldwide. Indeed **Senegal** saw **three** people imprisoned for **criminal defamation** in a week; the government threatens criminal prosecution of newspaper over articles critical of president. The frequent use of criminal law against independent journalists forces the use of self-censorship. In **Sierra Leone**, the press secretary to State House, Sheka Tarawally, threatened New Vision, an independent Freetown-based newspaper, with legal action if the newspaper failed to retract three articles which accused President Ernest Bai Koroma of being wasteful.

Access to Information

The **Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC)**, an initiative set up by a network of human rights and media freedom organizations, who are partners of the ARTICLE 19 Africa Programme, welcomed the steps taken by **Liberia** to adopt a Freedom of Information law for the country and calls on the National Legislature to expedite action in passing the Freedom of Information Bill submitted to it last month by a coalition of ordinary citizens, media and civil society organizations.

An article written by AFIC steering group member, Mukelani Dimba, discussing 'Access to Information as a Tool for Socio-economic Justice' was also published this month by ARTICLE 19 partner Fahamu: <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/47179>.

Around Africa is compiled of news alerts from various sources.

ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.

If you no longer wish to remain on ARTICLE 19's mailing list, please unsubscribe [here](#)

Alternatively, if you would like to receive **region specific information** only, send an email to [subscribe](#) stating which regions you would like to receive information about.

ARTICLE 19
6-8 Amwell Street London EC1R 1UQ United Kingdom
Tel: +44 20 7278 9292 - Fax: +44 20 7278 7660 - info@article19.org - www.article19.org