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ARTICLE 19

Around Africa June 2008

Around Africa for the month of June, continues to follow the grave situation in Zimbabwe where freedom of expression amidst the election turmoil continues to be curtailed. However, ARTICLE 19 also welcomes **the launch of a website for Zimbabwean journalists** and newsmakers in Zimbabwe. Hundreds of Zimbabwean journalists have been forced into the streets or into exile for political and economic reasons save for a small but vibrant media. The website will serve to circulate information that journalists may find handy in their work, to provide a platform for communication between newsmakers and journalists. <http://www.mediainzimbabwe.com/>

ArtVenture in association with ARTICLE 19 has proudly launched this month a newly established US\$100,000 **Freedom to Create Prize** which will honour artists around the world who promote human rights and free expression and are denied their "freedom to create." <http://www.freedomtcreateprize.com/>

ARTICLE 19 also welcomes the Economic Community for West Africa States' (ECOWAS), a regional court, ruling issued on the 5 June ordering **The Gambia** to release **Chief Ebrima Manneh**, a reporter who was arrested on 7 July 2006 and has been missing ever since. The ruling is the first of its kind concerning a journalist. This decision is a victory for those who have been fighting for years against impunity in The Gambia.

Despite some good news, this month has shown again that attacks on media remain commonplace on the African continent. For instance, a survey released on the 18 June by the *Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)* shows that **half of journalists in exile worldwide, are from Somalia**. Somali journalists literally ran for their lives, fleeing from incidents of assault, threats of violence, or having received death threats. Severe harassment such as police surveillance, repeated interrogations and sporadic detentions drive them into exile. Other countries saw flights of journalists in the last year in Africa like **Chad, Ethiopia** and **Eritrea**.

The Presidential Election Crisis in Zimbabwe Continues

Zimbabwe's presidential runoff elections took place on the 27 June, President Mugabe was the only candidate standing following the withdrawal of the opposition leader **Morgan Tsvangirai** from the race after an intense campaign of state-sponsored violence; dozens of opposition supporters have been killed and thousands of people injured in the campaign.

ARTICLE 19 has expressed its continued concern at the skewed coverage of the campaign preceding this election, more so by the state media and in particular the national broadcaster, the **Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation**. We condemn the unwarranted arrest on the 30th of **seven Zimbabweans and foreign journalists** three of whom are still being detained. Three other media practitioners were arrested whilst carrying out media monitoring in the country and another **two** freelance journalists were arrested and released in Harare this month.

A **media monitoring mission** to examine the media in Zimbabwe in this context was undertaken from 8 to 13 June by a team of African media experts including ARTICLE 19 partner, **Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA)**. The purpose was to ascertain the conditions of media and freedom of expression in the country in the light of the arrests of journalists, both local and foreign, and the deteriorating freedom of expression environment. A statement on the report which is due to be released shortly is available here: <http://africa.ifj.org/en/articles/statement-of-the-zimbabwe-fact-finding-mission-of-african-media-organisations-13-june-2008-harare-zimbabwe>.

The government has slapped an import duty on all newspapers, magazines and periodicals coming into the country in another move that will further deteriorate the poor levels of access to information in that the country. This move is meant to curb the entry into the country of what the state-owned *Herald* newspaper called "hostile foreign newspapers".

Intimidation of the media

Indeed, the Zimbabwean authorities are not the only government in Africa to threaten journalists this month. ARTICLE 19 has urged the **Cameroonian Government** to end the intimidation of those reporting on **corruption scandals** in the country after at least five journalists and media sector leaders were interrogated by police in connection with the publication of articles on a defective aircraft bought for President Paul Biya. Police harassment of the media is unacceptable and reflects a government campaign to intimidate journalists who cover corruption scandals. This is at least the **third** case in recent months of police interrogating journalists after they reported on government issues. Meanwhile in **Swaziland**, traditional authorities continue to harass and intimidate any critics of the Swazi monarchy.

Violent attacks on journalists Africa persist

We firmly condemn the shocking targeted assassination of the vice-president of the **National Union of Somali Journalist, Nasteh Dahir Farah**, who was gunned down in **Somalia**, on 7 June. He was devoted to ensuring the safety and press freedom of union members while ensuring that journalists followed ethical rules of journalism. He was one of 25 journalists who were trained as press freedom protectors and he assisted various investigations of attacks on media freedom. ARTICLE 19 has issued a statement expressing its concern. <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/somalia-nasteh-dahir-farah.pdf>

Meanwhile in Nairobi, **Kenya**, a New Zealand-born photojournalist was found murdered. **Trent Keegan** was working on an investigative story about a land dispute in northern Tanzania between a local tribe and the U.S. based company Thomson Safaris. **Ghana, Senegal, Niger and Liberia** have all seen cases of attacks and arrests of the media practitioners. As has **Sudan** where a journalists was held incommunicado over a two week period, released and then re-arrested.

In **Senegal**, on 21 June, two sports journalists were brutally beaten by Senegalese police at Leopold Sedar Senghor Stadium in Dakar. **Kara Thioune** of West Africa Democracy Radio and **Babacar Kambel Diang**, of Radio Futurs Medias, were beaten. Physical attacks and threats against independent journalists in Senegal have increased these last months. ARTICLE 19 is deeply concerned about this ongoing culture of impunity for crimes against journalists.

ARTICLE 19 also criticizes the Niamey public prosecutor's decision in **Niger** to file an immediate appeal against the decision to allow detained journalist **Moussa Kaka** to be released provisionally.

The appeal blocked the release of Kaka, who continues to be held in a Niamey prison on a charge of "complicity in a conspiracy against the authority of the state" since 20 September 2007.

Defamation in Africa

Several journalists have been arrested and sentenced for **defamation** throughout the continent. On the 6 June, **Nsimba Embete Ponte**, editor of the privately-owned twice-weekly newspaper *L'Interprète*, and his assistant, were transferred from the National Intelligence Agency to the court of Matete, in Kinshasa, **Democratic Republic of Congo**. They were held incommunicado, for 90 and 68 days, respectively, during which they had no access to a lawyer, a doctor, or visitors. They were charged with "publishing false news, threatening state security and insulting the president". In **Angola**, the journalist **Felisberto da Grâça Campos** was sentenced by an Angolan court to six months in prison for allegedly defaming former justice minister **Paulo Tjipilika**.

Censorship

ARTICLE 19 condemns the methods being used by the **Sudanese National Unity Government** to censor Khartoum-based newspapers. In the latest case, on 2 June, members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement - the political wing of the former rebel group in the south that is now part of the Unity Government - participated in a raid on the privately-owned Arabic-language daily *Ajras Al-Huriyya*. A unit of the Sudanese security forces raided the Khartoum printing press that prints the paper and ordered the removal of an entire page. The security forces also asked *Ajras Al-Huriyya*'s staff to sign a previously-drafted statement undertaking not to publish the censored content online or elsewhere.

The press based in Khartoum remain subject to daily censorship by Sudanese authorities in spite of the provisions in the Sudanese Constitution protecting freedom of expression rights and Sudan's obligations under **Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights**, to which it is a signatory, where '*Every individual shall have the right to receive information*'.

Also in Sudan, and following on from our attendance at a consultative workshop in May for discussion of the four South Sudanese draft Media Bills, hosted by the Ministry for Information and Broadcasting for the Government of South Sudan, **ARTICLE 19** submitted suggestions for **guiding principles** for inclusion in the draft Bills to ensure they adhere to obligations for respect of fundamental freedom of expression rights. These suggestions were submitted jointly with ARTICLE 19's partners for the consortium project '*Promotion Freedom of expression and Civil Society Involvement in Developing Democratic media Legislation in Sudan*', who include the Association for Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISS).