Eastern Africa: Safety and protection training for journalists

ARTICLE 19

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A three-day inaugural regional safety and protection training conducted by ARTICLE 19 for 25 journalists, hailing from six Eastern Africa countries including Burundi, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and Rwanda, ended on 8 Dec 2011. ARTICLE 19 set up the training in response to the increasing dangers faced by journalists, human rights defenders and bloggers operating in these countries, to enable them to deal with the daily risks they face whilst performing their job.

"ARTICLE 19 is concerned about the safety of journalists operating in Eastern Africa, given the increasing number of attacks and killing of media workers. We are committed to assisting journalists to increase their ability to protect themselves, and to hold public bodies accountable for meeting their obligations to create the conditions for an independent and free media," said Henry Maina, Director of ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa, which monitors cases of violence and aggression against journalists and media workers in Eastern Africa.

The journalists who attended the workshop represented both state-owned broadcasters and major commercial media houses from across the region. During the training, topics covered included international freedom of expression standards, ethics and journalism, security, self-protection and risk management. The programme also covered special security threats for journalists relating to use of information communication technologies and methods of self-protection.

"This training was quite timely and rare. I have been in journalism for a long but never had such training, even though we have covered live conflicts in the region. The fact that journalists from the region, currently covering the African Mission in Somalia for example, have received this training means we have more skills to assess the risks in each situation," said Stephen Bwire, a Ugandan journalist.

ARTICLE 19 believes that in order to ensure the safety and security of media workers, they need to know their rights and know how to protect themselves, including by conducting an assessment of the potential risks, and by identifying and adopting the best possible measures to counteract them.

The training was supported by UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and will be followed up with country specific monitoring and documentation of cases of aggression against media workers.