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The Code of Silence:
Nigeria’s Culture of Secrecy in Public Affairs

The most common criticism of the news media in Nigeria is that no great effort is made to ensure that the information published is accurate. And at every opportunity, the government deploys all its legislative authority to punish this “grievous” lapse.

Ironically the government itself makes no effort to erect structures for journalists, and indeed other members of the public, to obtain accurate information about its programmes and activities, or to verify information which they already have.

There is no right of public or media access to official information and records in Nigeria. There are no legislative or administrative procedures specifying channels for the mandatory release of official information to the public, except information voluntarily released by very senior government officials or issued as press statements, which are usually intended to serve propaganda purposes.

Instead, documents are routinely marked as “top secret”, “classified”, “confidential”, etc. Secrecy clauses are also drafted, as a matter of course, in to various legislation.

Yet Section 21 of the 1979 Constitution imposes a duty on “[t]he press, radio, television and other agencies of mass media” to “highlight the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people” without providing any legal framework to assist journalists in discharging this function.

Even where a law recognizes that members of the public have a role to play in achieving the purpose of that law, the mechanisms for effective public participation are either absent or are so vague as to have an overall effect of being non-existent.
An instance of such laws is the Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act, Cap 56, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990, which established a Code of conduct Bureau entrusted with the responsibility to, among other things, receive assets declarations by public officers and to receive complaints from members of the public about non-compliance with, or breach of, the provisions of the Act.

But the Act contains no provision or mechanism by which journalists or other members of the public can ascertain the extent to which public officers have complied with the provisions of the Act as there is no right of public access to information submitted by public officers under the Act. Thus, members of the public cannot contribute to the effective administration of the assets declaration process.

Conversely, numerous legislation have very specific secrecy clauses which forbid the disclosure of information, usually under very broad “public interest” claims. Even the courts of law are, in many cases, precluded from compelling the disclosure of such information.

Instances of such secrecy clauses are contained in legislative provisions such as Section 168 of the Evidence Act; Section 2 of the Federal Commissions (Privileges and Immunities) Act, Cap. 130, LFN, 1990; Section 10 (2) of the Public complaints commission Act; Section 12 (2) of the Architects (Registration, etc) Act; Sections 53 and 55 of the Nigerian Railway Corporation Act; and Section 13 of the Statistics Act, Cap 416, LFN, 1990.

Besides certain categories of government officials are obliged upon employment to subscribe to an oath of secrecy under which they undertake not to disclose any information which comes to them in the course of the performance of their duties unless specifically authorized to do so.

This has resulted in a situation where civil servants and other public officers are unwilling to disclose even the most innocuous information to journalists or grant press interviews or give their views and opinions on public issues unless specifically authorized to do so by a very senior government official.

The situation has engendered a culture of secrecy in government institutions, which insulates governments and their actions from public scrutiny.

Besides the fact that the government has taken on no legal obligation to disclose information to members of the public, it in fact arrogated to itself the legal authority to punish anyone who is able to obtain such information for himself. One way by which it does this is through the use of the Official Secrets Act which successive government have continued to retain since the colonial period. Section 1 (1) of the Act provides, amongst other things, that:

“a...person who-
(a) transmits any classified matter to a person to whom he is not authorized on behalf of the government to transmit it, or
(b) obtains, reproduces or retains any classified matter which he is not authorized on behalf of the government to obtain, reproduce or retain, as the case may be shall be guilty of an offence.”

Any person who commits an offence under this provision is liable on conviction, on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 14 years, and on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine of an amount not exceeding N200 or to both such imprisonment and fine. Besides the legal hazards posed by the Official Secrets Act to anyone seeking to access information and records in the custody of the government, the Criminal code also erects further impediments in the way of anyone seeking information from unofficial sources in the service of any government. The Criminal code makes it a penal offence for any public or civil servant to give out official information.

Section 97(1) of the law provides that “Any person who being employed in the public service, publishes or communicates any fact which comes to his knowledge by virtue of his office and which it is duty to keep secret, or any document which comes to his possession by virtue of office and which it is his duty to keep secret, except to some person to whom he is bound to publish or communicate it, is guilty of a misdemeanor”.

2
The right of access to information held by Governments and public authorities remains an essential component of the right to freedom of expression. This view has gained wide international acceptance and endorsement.

At its first session, the United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 59(1) of December 14, 1946, stated that “freedom of information is a fundamental human right and is the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated. Freedom of information implies the right to gather, transmit and publish news anywhere and everywhere without fetters. As such, it is an essential factor in any serious effort to promote the peace and progress of the world.”

Subsequent human rights instruments emanating from the United Nations systems have underscored this view in their wordings. For instance, Article 19(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides that “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice” (emphasis supplied).

Nearer home, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights provides that “Every individual shall have the right to receive information.”

Numerous countries in the world, including South Africa, Costa Rica, Guatemala, India, Malawi, and South Korea, have constitutional guarantees of access to government-held information. Many more others have explicit legislative provisions on freedom of information legislation for over 200 years.

The decision of the Supreme Court of India, a third World country like Nigeria, in State of U.P. v Raj Norain, AIR 1975 SC 865 and 884 on the imperative of a right of access to information is instructive.

The court said: “The people of this country have a right to know every public act, everything that is done in a public way, by their public functionaries” adding that “They are entitled to know the particulars of every public transaction in all its bearing. The right to know, which is derived from the concept of freedom of speech, though not absolute, is a factor which should make one wary when secrecy is claimed for transactions which can, at any rate, have no repercussion on public security.”

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Mr. Abid Hussain, has consistently underscored the primacy of the right of access to information in the exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

In his report to the UN Commission on Human Rights in April 1995 (Document No. E/CN.4/1995/321 Para. 35), the Special Rapporteur said: “Freedom will be bereft of all effectiveness if the people have no access to information. Access to information is basic to the democratic way of life. The tendency to withhold information from the people at large is therefore to be strongly checked.” Again, in April this year, the Special Rapporteur also noted in his fourth report to the Commission that “the right to seek and receive information is one of the essential elements of freedom of expression” and urged that “the right of everyone to receive information and ideas just be adequately protected.”

These provisions and pronouncements evidence a growing recognition nationally and international of the obligations on government to provide information to their citizens through clearly defined legal and constitutional procedures.

In an effort to assist the Nigerian Government to join this global trend, the Media Rights Agenda (MRA) is working with the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), prepared in 1994 a draft bill entitled “Access to Official Information Act” which was reviewed and adopted by a technical workshop in March 1995 with a revised title – “Access to Public Records and Information Act.”

The document guarantees every citizen a broad right of access to information, and provides a legal framework through which the Nigerian Government can administer a freedom of information regime, while recognizing instances when information may be legitimately withheld from citizens.
In adopting this or any other freedom of information legislation, we commend to the Nigerian government the 11 principles outlined by the International Centre Against Censorship (ARTICLE 19) in London in its Guidelines for the creation of Freedom of Information Legislation. They are:

1. Freedom of Information legislation must be based on the presumption of access. This principle is hinged on the fact that the underlying basis of freedom of information legislation is the right to the broad provision of information to the public or at the public’s request, and as such, the theory is that governments should release more information on its own initiative, and agencies must justify why information should be withheld. Furthermore, there is no need to require an individual to show an interest or protection of a right before that individual can make a request for information.

2. Individuals must be informed of their right to freedom of information. The rationale for this principle is that the right to freedom of information is meaningless if individuals do not know what that right entails and how to exercise it.

3. Freedom of information entails an obligation on governments to hold open meetings. The reason is that one element of freedom of information is the public’s right to know what the government is doing on its behalf and to be able to participate in the decision making process.

4. Reasons for the denial of access must be specified and narrowly tailored. This is because derogations on the basic presumption of freedom of information cannot be so broad as to do away with the right.

5. Existing laws or policies that restrict freedom of information must be repealed. This principle is based on the argument that freedom of information legislation cannot be honestly enforced if laws or policies that restrict freedom of information are maintained. Such laws include Official Secrets Acts.

6. Freedom of information schemes should be easy to use and administer, and cost effective by way of long-term benefits.

7. The right to obtain information from the government should apply regardless of the form in which the material is held. The essence of this is that information should be accessible in a variety of ways that are reasonable but allow for individuals to obtain the material in a manner that is understandable to them. The primary basis for the legislation, however, should remain focused on the ability of individuals to scrutinize the workings of government, to obtain information held by authorities generally and about themselves, and to promote an open, accountable administration of the country.

8. The type of information accessible to the public must be broad and inclusive. This means that they type of information the public might seek might include material concerning resources, agriculture, and the environment, which impact on the daily life of a country’s citizen. Therefore, the legislation could require government agencies to publish information it had collected in the course of its work in this area, and report on official inspections and activities of monitoring agencies.

9. Individuals should have free access to personal information compiled on them, and such information should be protected against general dissemination.

10. Enforcement mechanisms are necessary to ensure an effective right of access. This requires that the process of appeal against a denial of information must make the right of access effective and provide an enforcement mechanism.

11. Individuals who release information to expose wrongdoings must be protected. The necessity for this is the need to strengthen the government’s accountability to the public. What this means is that freedom of information legislation should include the protection of individuals who release material in an effort to expose corruption, malfeasance and other alleged illegal activities. The “whistleblower” should therefore not be liable to civil, criminal or disciplinary actions where he in good faith reasonably believed that he was disclosing evidence of illegal activities or other corruption in connection with government duties or offices.
Security Agents Intensify Attacks On Journalists

The onslaught on journalists and media establishments which re-surfaced in September, intensified last month as security agents continued to carry out incessant raids on newspaper and magazine facilities in search of journalists and editors to arrest.

The News/Tempo as well as Tell magazines remained the major targets, although The News family bore the brunt of most of the attacks for last month.

All over the country, journalists with the magazine were endangered, including the editor-in-chief, Bayo Onanuga, to go into hiding. Onanuga, who has frequently been arrested and detained in the past by various categories of security agents, went into hiding on October 6 after the police issued a warrant summoning him to report at the Police Force Headquarters in Abuja. But the publications as well as the daily evening newspaper, P.M. News, continued to appear regularly on newsstands despite the spate of harassments.

Eleven years to the month after founding editor-in-chief of Newswatch magazine, Dele Giwa, was killed by a parcel bomb delivered to his house by unknown assassins, Tell magazine’s management raised an alarm over death threats sent to 22 of its editors, directors and other staff.

Tell’s management, made up of Dele Giwa’s former colleagues at Newswatch, said they were being threatened by a “shadowy organization” for their alleged “unpatriotic opposition” to Nigeria’s military government.

The siege on the magazine by security agents also continued.

Inexplicably, the recuperating African Concord magazine editor, Soji Omotunde, was abducted on the streets of Lagos by security agents during the month even though the publication has been off the streets for several weeks. He remained in detention at the month’s end along with the magazine’s Abuja Bureau Chief, Mohammed Adamu, who was arrested at his Abuja home on Sunday, July 27.

Sadly, Reth Ateloye, the FAME magazine Liberian, who was arrested in September and detained for five days in place of the editor, died two weeks after his release. He had taken ill during his detention.

In Yobe State, eight workers at the state-owned television station got the beating of their lives – for daring to air a documentary which portrayed the former administrator of the State in good light when they should have been singing the praises of the incumbent. The Military Administrator, Wing Commander John Ben Kalio, reportedly ordered soldiers attached to his office to beat them up.

No one, it appears, was untouched by the plague as journalists working with The Guardian newspaper, The Week magazine, This Day newspaper, Post Express newspaper, the Democrat newspaper and the Daily Sketch newspapers were also arrested and briefly detained.

Details of instance of attacks on the press during the month are as follows:

Tell Magazine Workers Receive Death Threats

The management of Tell magazine alleged last month that 22 of its editors, directors and other categories of workers were being threatened with death by a shadowy organization for their alleged “unpatriotic opposition” to the Nigerian government.

A statement issued on October 29 by the magazine’s managing editor, Onome Osifo-Whiskey, said: “A few months ago, a shadowy organization parading itself as above the law and even above public outcry, mailed us what may well be its customized hit list for TELL. It had 22 names of our staff, including the editors and directors, on it.”

Osifo-Whiskey said besides demanding huge sums of money as ransom for each of the named staff, the organization notified the media house that it was ready to kill to halt Tell’s “unpatriotic opposition” to the “powers that rule the land”.

According to him, the organization warned that if Tell doubted its resolve about the threats, it should remember the fate of the late nationalist, Chief Alfred Rewane, who was murdered in his
Ikeja home in Lagos in the morning of October 5, 1995 and a host of other prominent figures assassinated over the last two years.

Osifo-Whiskey said with the recent invasion of the residence of Tell’s editor-in-chief, Nosa Igiebor, by a detachment of operatives of the State Security Services (SSS) and the Lagos State anti-robbery squad, Operation Sweep, while he was away on holiday abroad, coupled with endless visits by SSS operatives to Tell’s office in Lagos and the previous week’s rumoured assassination of Igiebor, the management was taking the latest threat to the lives of its editors and directors seriously.

He noted that “as the shadowy organization did remind us, this is the land where the Rewanes, the Kudi Abiola, the Madam Tejuoshos, have been shot dead by assassins without arrest. We know also that only associates and relations of the assassinated end up, too smoothly arrested and detained.”

**FAME Magazine Staff Dies After Detention**

Fame magazine’s librarian, Reth Ateloye, who was arrested on September 17 and detained for five days died on October 5 – two weeks after his release. He is believe to have died from an illness which he developed while in detention.

Ateloye, who was arrested by security agents from the Federal Investigation and Intelligence Bureau (FIIB) in Lagos on September 17 and released on September 22, died at a private hospital in Ketu, in the outskirts of Lagos. The security men went to the premises of the weekly magazine in a bid to arrest the editor, who was not in. After searching the premises, the security men arrested Ateloye, who was disabled and walking with the aid of crutches, in place of the editor, saying they would hold onto him until one of the editors of the magazine reported at the FIIB.

At the FIIB at Alagbon Close in Ikoyi, where he was detained, Ateloye was placed in an overcrowded cell where he took ill two days after his arrest. When his condition deteriorated, he was taken to a military hospital in Ikoyi until his condition improved lightly and he was thereafter released on September 22.

But after his release, his condition worsened and he could not resume for work. He was reportedly taken to the National Orthopaedic Hospital in Lagos, which gave him an appointment for October 6. But before that date, his condition deteriorated further and he had to be taken to another hospital, from where he was again transferred to the hospital in Ketu where he died.

**Eight Television Station Workers Assaulted**

Eight workers at the Yobe State Television (YTV), in Damaturu, the state capital, were assaulted on October 6 by security agents attached to the state Military Administrator Wing commander John Ben Kalio.

The administrator reportedly ordered the flogging of the television workers following a 45-minute documentary aired by the station on that day, highlighting the achievements of the immediate past administrator of the State, Police Commander Dabo Aliyu. The programme was aired between 9.00 pm and 9.45pm in place of the regular network news of the national television the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). The documentary mentioned, among other things, achievements in the provision of social services such as the creation of boreholes, hand pumps, schools and the promotion of rural infrastructure.

Reports said after Commander Kalio saw the documentary, he ordered soldiers stationed at the government house to go to the television station, arrest all the staff on duty and bring them to his office. He also ordered that the television station should be shut down.

When the workers were brought, commander Kalio proceeded to personally supervise the drilling and beating of the station’s workers. He ordered the soldiers to stop when he observed that some of the television workers had fainted.

The television workers were then put in a pick-up van and driven to the state headquarters of the State Security Service (SSS), where they were briefly detained before being taken to the hospital for treatment.
The government has not denied news report of the incident.

**Security Agents Arrest The News, Tempo Editors**

Security agents raided the premises of Independent communications Network Limited (ICNL), publishers of The News and Tempo magazines, in Ogba, Lagos, on October 17 and arrested two editors.

Those arrested were Demola Abimboye, associate editor of The News and Gbenga Alaketu, assistant editor of Tempo.

According to Iyobosa Uwageari, a journalist working with the magazines, the plain-clothed security agents believed to be operatives of the State Security Service (SSS), arrived the premises at about 6.40 pm, but did not give any reason for their action.

The editors were later taken to the Federal bureau of Investigations and Intelligence (FIIB) at Alagbon Close in Ikoyi, Lagos, from where they were transferred to Abuja the next day.

At Abuja, they were detained at the Police Force Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Headquarters in Garki District until the evening of October 19, when they were released.

The journalists said after their release that they were questioned about a number of stories published by the two magazines.

**Two Journalists Arrested in Benue State**

The Benue State correspondent for The Democrat newspaper, Tenkum Kokoh, and his counterpart in the Daily Sketch newspaper, Folu Oyewusi, were arrested and detained by police men in Makurdi, the Benue State on October 1.

They were arrested while holding a seminar on “Nigeria’ 98 and the Principles of Rotational Presidency”; in commemoration of Nigeria’s 37th independence anniversary.

While at the seminar, they were invited to a meeting with the police and arrested when they arrived. They were subsequently detained.

No reason was given for their arrest and detention, but they were released a few days later.

**Five Journalists In Bayelsa State Arrested**

Security agents in Bayelsa State on October 18 arrested and briefly detained five journalists representing different media establishments who were trying to cover a rally organized by the youths in the area protesting the activities of the Shell Petroleum Development company and the Federal Government in the Delta region.

The journalists who were arrested are Casmir Igbokwe of TheNews magazine; Wisdom Dike of TheWeek magazine; Joseph Ollor-Obari, a reporter with The Guardian; Tokunbo Awoshakin of ThisDay newspaper; and Doifie Ola of Post Express.

The journalists had gone to Ogbia, in Bayelsa State to cover the rally when security men raided the town in a bid to stop the rally. But the security agents were unsuccessful as the organizers had arranged an alternative venue for the rally at the nearby town of Itokopiri, unknown to the security men.

The journalists were also unaware of the change in venue and were trying to find the new place when the security agents ran into them and arrested them.

They were thereafter detained and interrogated before they were released several hours later after being warned not to publish any story on the incident.

**TheNews correspondent in Kaduna Arrested**

The Kaduna State Correspondent of The News and Tempo magazine, Henry Ugbohule, was arrested on October 10 by security agents in the state and reportedly tortured for which he had to be hospitalized.
Ugbolue was arrested by security men attached to the Government House in Kaduna and beaten up before he was taken to the Government House where he was detained for several hours and allegedly tortured.

He was released in the evening of the same day and asked to report to the Government House daily. Upon his release, he was hospitalized in Kaduna and treated for the injuries he sustained during the beating and torture.

Although no official reason was given for the action of the security agents, it is believed to have been as a result of a story he published in the October 8 issue of Tempo entitled “Goodbye Justice” which reported the sacking of 30,000 civil servants in the state by the Military Administrator, Lt. Colonel Hamed Ali.

Ugbolue went into hiding shortly after his release. But the security agents raided The News office at least three times the following week in search for him. The security men promised to deal ruthlessly with him whenever they caught up with him.

Security Agents Arrest African Concord Editor

The Editor of the African Concord magazine, Soji Omotunde, was on October 25 arrested by security agents in Lagos who took him forcibly from his car, gagged him and bundled him into their car.

Reports said Omotunde was driving along Adeniyi Jones Avenue in the Ikeja area of Lagos, when the security agents overtook his car and blocked it with theirs, a Peugeot 505 car. Two men alighted from the car to arrest him.

Although Omotunde asked the security men to allow him to drive his own car to their destination, they refused which led to an argument.

The agents then forcibly wrestled Omotunde to the ground, bundled him into their car and gagged him as he shouted to attract attention. He was driven away to an unknown destination.

African Concord’s editor-in-chief, Lewis Obi, said in a statement that the “reason for his arrest is clearly a mystery since the African Concord has been off the streets for six weeks, no thanks to pressures of all kinds, including the abduction and detention of our Abuja Bureau chief Mohammed Adamu, on July 27 almost in identical circumstances with Omotunde’s.

Obi said Omotunde was in bad health as a result of serious injuries he suffered in a car accident in Akure, Ondo State, in January this year from which he has not fully recovered. He is said to walk with a cane and requires regular medical attention.

Media Rights Monitor is published by the Media Rights Agenda (MRA), a non-governmental organisation established for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria. The MRA has observer status with the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights and is a component of the FEDERC FOUNDATION which is registered under Nigeria law.

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Anselm Chidi Odinkalu
In his report to the 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in April, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Mr. Abid Hussain, noted that the right to seek and receive information is one of the essential elements of freedom of expression. He therefore denounced “the tendency of many governments to withhold information from the people at large through such measures as censorship”, urging that “the right of everyone to receive information and ideas must be adequately protected.’ This view is in consonance with the proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 that “freedom of information is a fundamental human right and it the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated.”

Nigeria has a longstanding tradition of governance behind “closed doors”. Successive governments have introduced and sustained a variety of measures to shield their policies, programmes and activities from public scrutiny, using such devices as the Official Secrets Act oaths of secrecy to which many categories of public officers are compelled to subscribe and decrees ousting the jurisdiction of courts to inquire into executive actions.

The end result is that members of the public and the media have no right of access to official information. They are therefore effectively barred from participating in the governance of the country, lacking as they are, the vital information they require to make intelligent judgments. Journalists themselves remain handicapped in fulfilling their constitutional role, as stated in Section 21 of the 1979 Constitution, to “highlight the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people.”

In this edition, we focus on the culture of secrecy in the conduct of public affairs with the inevitable conclusion that a new legal regime enthroning a legal right of access to public records and information is imperative.

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**LETTERS**

**Keep The Flag Flying**

We write to commend you for the very good work you are doing by your publication. Your last publication of October 1997, vol. 2, No. 5 is of particular interest and commendation because of the awakening of a consciousness it will arouse.
We do not consider it sufficient to join everybody to condemn the new wave of clamp down on citizens of this country especially the journalists. When Decree 4 of 1984 was in force, it was clear that there was a war on journalists. The journalists could then devise their strategy against the war. It is now a case of undefined war, through abduction rather than arrest, and harassment of relations and neighbours of our journalists whose services are essential for bringing the Government to the people and vice versa. This trend is more dangerous and hardly different from events of the Otokoto saga. We believe that the trend poses more threat to State security in its real sense than the government conceives for arresting citizens indiscriminately.

It should be restated that all those anomalies are happening at our time because we have left the law behind. From the true content of our law, it is unlawful for government or government security agents to clamp down on journalists for any reason that does not involve a crime for which investigation is going on.

From series of cases in your latest publication, serious constitutional question is raised as to whether the State or State functionary, including the Head of State, can set the security agents after the citizens of this country for alleged acts that are considered embarrassing. For example, that Esezoobo insults General Abacha, the Head of State, or General Diya is not justification for him to send security agents to arrest him. The Head of state of Diya can reply to the insults, if necessary, through his Press Secretary. If there is any libel in it, he should go to court. That was what Bisi Onabanjo did during his time as Governor of Ogun State. And that is in line with the content of our law. But because we have left the law behind, when a journalist is seized, we go to court to ask that he be charged to court. Of course, the evil man that the government is will quickly frame up a charge to justify detention. Question of bail arises and the man is kept away.

The question I have hinted was raised but hedged about and left unanswered when Mohammed Bashir alleged that Aikhomu was using the Decree 2 to oppress him over disagreement arising from commercial relationship.

In the awakening being induced by your publications, we have no doubt that the people will be more enlightened on enforcement on human rights in Nigeria. Please keep the flag flying. May God keep you.

Johnson O. Esezoobo
J. Odion Esezoobo & Co.
(Legal Practitioners & Consultants)
105, Ikorodu Road, Lagos.

Nine More Radio Stations Get Licences

Nine privately-owned companies were granted broadcast licences by the Federal government last month to operate radio stations at different locations across the country.

The new stations bring to 11 the number of privately-owned radio stations in the country with Minaj Systems Radio (MSR) in Obosi, Anambra state, and Ray Power 100.5 FM in Lagos already in operation. Ray Power 100.5 FM was the first to be licenced when its holding company, Daar Communications Limited, obtained radio licence in August 1994.

The Minister for Information and Culture, Dr. Walter Ofonagoro, announced last month that the Head of State, General Sani Abacha, had granted approval to the nine stations to begin radio transmission.

The companies granted licences are Dynamic Communications in Kano; MG Communications in Kaduna; NATCO Communications in Abuja; Ovide Communications Limited in Okenne; De globe Limited in Ilorin; Steam All Music Station in Lagos; Silverbird Radio in Lagos; Radio Jeremi in Warri and IBW Enterprises in Benin.

But shortly after the approvals were announced, the Director-General of the National Broadcasting commission, Dr. Tom Adaba, warned that any of the newly licence stations which fails to commence transmission within one year would have its licence revoked.
Speaking at a one-day orientation workshop organized for the new stations by the Commission on October 20, Adaba told the chief executives of the companies “you have one year period within which to start transmission. If you fail, the law says your licence is automatically revoked.”

He told them to ensure the survival of their stations by complying with the rules and regulations of broadcasting in Nigeria, including those stipulated in the revised National Broadcasting code, the Copyright Decree, the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria code pf Advertising Practice, the Wireless Act, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria Act, and the Transition to Civil Rule (Political Parties Registration and Activities) Decree No 27.

The total number of applicants for broadcast licences since the deregulation of broadcasting in Nigeria by the National Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38 of 1992 five years ago is still a closely guarded secret.

Media Rights Monitor learnt that as at June 8, 1995, the number stood at 321 comprising 64 applications for radio licences, 59 for television and 198 for cable satellite redistribution.

Presently, 11 private stations have been given radio licences, 27 have cable satellite redistribution licences, while 10 private television stations are now operational nationwide.

**Freedom of Information: Key Features of Draft Legislation**

The essence of the draft “Access to Public Records and Information Act”, as stated in its preamble, is to “make public records and information more freely available, to provide for public access to public records and information, to protect public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest and the protection of personal privacy, to protect serving public officers from administrative retaliation and other adverse consequences for disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization, to establish procedures for the achievement of these purposes, and to repeal certain statutory provisions inconsistent with the terms and purposes” of the Act.

It provides a general right of access to information under Section 4(1) of the draft in the following terms: “Subject to the provisions of this Act but notwithstanding anything contained in any other Act, Edict, law, or regulation, every person is a citizen of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, has a legally enforceable right to and shall on request, be given access to any record under the control of a government or public institution.”

The draft bill recognizes certain exemptions from the general right of access to all official records and information and outlines circumstances where the government or its agencies may decline to grant access to certain kinds of information.

Such circumstances include:

- when the request for access relates to information obtained in confidence by government from a foreign government or institution, unless that foreign government or institution has consented to the information being released or has itself previously made the information public;
- when the request is for information pertaining to investigative techniques or plans for specific investigations which would reasonably be expected to be injurious to the conduct of any lawful investigation, such as the identity of a confidential source of information; or information which may be injurious to the security of any penal institution; or information which could reasonably be expected to facilitate the commission of a crime;
- when the request is for information whose release may be injurious to the conduct of the international affairs of Nigeria or its defence;
- when the request relates to trade secrets of third parties or trade and financial information, the disclosure of which could prejudice the competitive position of the government or any of its institutions;
- where the information requested contains information, the disclosure of which could reasonably be expected to threaten the safety of individuals;
when the request pertains to any information, especially relating to the health records of any individual, unless public interest in the disclosure of such information clearly outweighs the protection of the privacy of that individual.

In order to prevent a floodgate of refusals under the cover of these exemptions, the draft bill provides that all decisions by government officials to refuse access to any record of information should be subject to judicial review. In other words, journalists or other citizens whose requests have been refused will be entitled to contest the refusal in the law court.

The court is empowered under the draft bill to examine any record to which the Act applies and conduct hearings in camera to avoid premature disclosure by the court or any person of any information sought to be withheld by any government agency or institution. The court may also order the release of information or record earlier declined if the refusal is adjudged to be wrongful.

Another feature of the draft bill is a requirement that every government or public institution should publish in the official gazette once every year a description of the institution, its responsibilities, including details of the programmes and functions of every division, branch or department and a description of all classes of records under the control of the institution in sufficient details to facilitate the exercise of the right of access to public records or information available in the institution.

The draft also provides that the gazette should contain the titles and addresses of the appropriate officers or employees of the institutions to whose request for access to records or information should be sent.

It imposes a time limit for the head of any institution to release requested information or decline access to the records in writing, stating the reasons for the refusal.

The draft bill provides for the payment of fees by anyone requesting access to official records. The fees are intended to cover the cost of producing copies of documents, or reproducing records stored in some other retrieval system such as computers, microfilm, video or audio equipment or to cover additional personnel requirements where an extended search would be involved in the request.

The Government Journalist is Impoverished, Says Editor

On September 5, Dagogo Clinton, editor of the Rivers State government-owned newspaper, the Tide, was suspended indefinitely by the State Government following a critical editorial comment published by the newspaper. His suspension was repeatedly broadcast on the state-owned radio throughout that day.

Although no official explanation was given for Clinton’s suspension, it is believed to have been as a result of an editorial published in September 3 and 4 edition of the newspaper entitled: “Save Port Harcourt Roads”. The editorial criticized the deplorable condition of roads in the state capital.

Three months before his suspension, Clinton spoke with Tive Denedo, Campaigns Director of the Media Rights Agenda (MRA) in Port Harcourt on what it feels like to work for the state owned news media organization and on the state of press freedom in Nigeria. Following are excerpts from the interview.

What is it like to work in a state-owned news media organization?

It is exciting because in working for government, l have been able to find peace and keep a cool head. Why do l say so? l say this because l see myself as somebody doing a balancing job act, keeping the peace and not fighting the war that does not exist. On the other hand, working with government is a problem when it comes to what you choose to write and having funds from them for projects. The kind of funds the media require is not the type that government is ready to part with. Consequently, the government journalists is always impoverished and ill-equipped for his work.

What are the prospects for the media if there is a transition without respect for human rights?

If that question is in respect of various laws that tend to limit the operation of the journalist, you will remember that these laws have been in the statute book. What happens is that a regime
comes up and it replaces or adds one other clause to suit the exigencies of the time. The Nigerian press has survived these draconian laws. Thanks to the Nigerian Judiciary that has implemented them to the letter.

There is ample freedom for the Nigerian press. By the time we have only professionals, the laws will be obsolete. (General Sani) Abacha is not the problem. There are certain issues that should not be propagated. They include sedition, falsehood, invasion of privacy. If you do, the law must catch up with you.

I carried a similar story once with Sunray newspaper. Sunray was taken to court, but we were not. That explains my earlier position that working with government has made me more careful, more detailed. I cannot afford to make mistakes.

That you work for government does not make you unprogressive. I have found that in my course of working for government, that I have done more for the down trodden. The best way to do things is not to fight, fight and engage in undue confrontation. It is understanding each other and getting into dialogue. The people in government are human beings too.

If government is the devil that we all fear, we need to get to that devil where it is and fight it or get on understanding. If I want to fight Abacha, I won’t stay in Port Harcourt to fight. There is no sword long enough. I will go to Aso Rock (Presidential Villa, Abuja).

Unfortunately, the people we call bad people we do not give a second chance. Let the political and press issues take their course. The transition programme and the media might be inter related, but they are quite distinct. The rules of the transition do not affect journalism they have gone to sleep on press laws where they should tackle government and are worried about the transition. We should report the event as it unfolds rather than being apprehensive. The laws are no threat; they are only reminders that we are under check.

*32 Press Freedom Groups Call For Action Against Nigeria*

The following is a joint letter signed by 32 press freedom groups worldwide and circulated to the leaders who attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Edinburgh, Scotland last month calling attention to the numerous violations in Nigeria against freedom of expression.

Dear Commonwealth leaders,

On the occasion of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Edinburgh, Scotland on 24-27 October, we, the press freedom organizations listed below, would like to draw your attention to the Numerous violations in Nigeria against freedom of expression, one of the most basic human rights.

In light of Nigeria’s failure to satisfy the conditions set out by the CHOGM, Nigeria should be expelled from the commonwealth, or at the very least, have its suspension continued.

It has been two years since the Nigerian government judicially executed the Nigeria author and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists. Not only has Nigeria’s human rights record not improved, but it has deteriorated even more. In addition, political prisoners, including four prominent journalists, remain in jail in abysmal conditions. Dissent is stifled on an almost daily basis despite the efforts of the dictatorship of General Sani Abacha to promote the deception that he is following through with the so-called transition to democracy should surely include freedom of expression, and given the current crackdown on the media, the international community can not be fooled into believing it is a genuine transition.

Upon suspending Nigeria for its lack of democratization, respect for human rights, and progress in the release of political prisoners, the CHOGM stated “that if no demonstrable progress was made towards the fulfillment of these conditions within a time frame (of two years), Nigeria would be expelled from the association.” The commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), charged with advising the Commonwealth of Nigeria, has found no improvement on these fronts.
Beyond the discussion of broader human rights abuses, freedom of expression violations are rampant in Nigeria. Newspapers are seized and news vendors – as well as journalists – are thrown in jail for publishing or selling news that offends the government. Many journalists have fled the country in fear of their lives, and other journalists have simply “disappeared.”

Among Nigeria’s most famous political prisoners are four journalists: Chris Anyanwu of the now-defunct The Sunday magazine; George Mbah of Tell; Ben Charles Obi of Weekend Classique; and Kunle Ajibade of The News. All have been in prison since May 1995, sentenced to 15 years for their alleged involvement in a failed coup plot – their “crime” was to report on the issue. All of them are in very poor health.

Another journalist, Mohammed Adamu, the Abuja editor of the African Concord magazine, is detained without charge. Moshood Fayemiwo, the exiled publisher of the defunct Lagos Weekly Razor, was abducted from neighbouring Benin Republic and has been detained in a military dungeon since February 1997.

Since the beginning of September, many journalists and news vendors have been detained over stories in independent publications on the state of Abacha’s health. Police arrested or tried to arrest journalists from The News and Tell in Lagos and other cities, and confiscated copies of The News, and their editors have gone into hiding.

On 5 September, Oby Eke Agbai, the chair of the Imo state council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists “disappeared” after being beaten by security forces and has not been seen since. A correspondent for The Punch newspaper was arrested over a story on Ken Saro-Wiwa, as was a Vanguard correspondent in Rivers State for reporting that copies of Saro-Wiwa’s books had been impounded by security forces.

Most recently, on 5 October, Reth Ateloye, of FAME magazine, died after developing an illness in jail after being detained for five days on 17 September. The other violations are too numerous to document.

In addition to attacks on the media, the Nigerian government has implemented press laws which severely restrict the media, and has introduced new laws, including one which would create a press court that would try journalists who “report untruths.” The Newspapers Registration Decree 43 of 1993, which the government has promised to revive, would impose prohibitive fees on an independent press which struggles to survive economic pressures from the government, and would allow the government to assert control over which newspapers receive licences.

A provision in the draft constitution proposes a National Mass Media commission, which will restrict newspaper circulation to their states (provinces) of production and interfere in the day-to-day running of media organizations.

The Nigerian government has failed to demonstrate that it is serious about the transition to democracy; conversely it has attempted to silence those who promote democracy. Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka is one of the many exiled advocates for democracy in Nigeria, in addition to prominent editors and journalists who have escaped arrest and fled their home.

Adding to this injustice were treason charges laid against Soyinka and others by the government in March in the wake of bombings for which Soyinka denies any responsibility. These charges demonstrate the lengths to which the government will go to silence its critics. Given the unfair trial afforded to Ken Saro-Wiwa would be given a fair trial on these charges.

By the recently promulgated Decree 9 of 1997, the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) was empowered to shift the dates of the remaining transition elections if it so desires. None of the five registered political parties is willing to present candidates for the presidency – a few politicians who hinted of presidential ambitions have been effectively harassed and silenced.

In late September, the army command issued a statement that it would give General Abacha absolute support if he chooses to run for the presidency. Everything points to a perpetuation of military rule or a self-succession plan that makes the “transition to democracy” a name without substance.
In light of these freedom of expression violations, this silencing of dissent and the voice of democracy, coupled with the continued detention of political prisoners, the CHOGM should have little difficulty taking the right decision against the Nigerian government (IFEX).

IAPA Discusses Press Freedom And Impunity

Press freedom and unpunished crimes against journalists were the main issues at the Inter American Press Association’s (IAPA) General Assembly, held on 18-22 October in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Danilo Arbilla, chair of the IAPA committee on Freedom of the Press and Information, presented reports on IAPA’s recent missions to Peru and Mexico, and former IAPA president David Lawrence presented a report on IAPA’s Unpunished Crimes Against Journalists conference held in Guatemala last July.

The murders of journalists in Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia and El Salvador were a concern at the meeting, as was poverty, corruption and democracy. In addition honouring Elie Abel, former journalism dean of Columbia and Stanford universities in the United States, with its Freedom of the Press Grand Prize, IAPA presented awards to journalists from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the U.S., Mexico, Peru and Uruguay.

At the meeting, IAPA passed resolutions condemning the murder of Jos Luis Cabezas in Argentina this year; the proposed press laws in Brazil, Chile, and Trinidad; the murders of three journalists and threats to “pluralism and independence of the media” through licensing in Colombia; the harassment of the independent press in Cuba; penal code regulations that violate press freedom in El Salvador; discriminatory treatment of advertising in the media in Guatemala and Puerto Rico; and discrimination in broadcasting and the lack of access to information in Antiqua and Barbuda.

Centre Launches Programme for Women Journalists

The African women’s Media Centre (AWMC) will officially launch its training and networking programmes for women journalists at a conference scheduled for next month in Dakar, Senegal.

According to On the Wire, the AWMC’s newsletter, over 40 women journalists from throughout sub-Saharan Africa will take part in this inaugural event scheduled for December 5 to 7. They will be joined by international press and observers from Africa and the United States.

The AWMC has invited the President of Senegal, Abdou Diouf, to open the programme and is expecting a number of other prominent Senegalese to attend. The conference will be hosted by AWMC’s co-chairs and International Women’s Media foundation (IWMF) board members, Judy Woodruff and Wilma Randle, as well as IWMF co-chair, Maureen Bunyan.

The conference sessions will include debates on the current status of women in the media and how to involve men in the dialogue; the role women’s organizations can play in promoting women; and women’s voices in the struggle for freedom of the press.

Training sessions will focus on computer-assisted reporting, effectively reaching radio and television audiences, and advanced journalism techniques.

During strategy sessions, the participants will discuss and develop concrete ideas for creating change on such topics as the image of women in the media, sexual harassment in the newsroom and working conditions of women in the media.

Participants at conference are being selected based on their experience in the field of journalism and also because of their active role in promoting women in the media.

The AWMC is a project of the IWMF, a private non-profit organization whose mission is to strengthen the role of women in the news media worldwide through training sessions for professional skill-building and media management, forums for networking and professional exchange, and issue based seminars.
Applications Invited to “Women’s Edition”

The U.S. based Population Reference Bureau (PRB) is inviting applications to “Women’s Edition”. The programme brings together senior women editors and producers from the print and broadcast media in developing countries to disseminate information on topics related to women’s health, development and population through the news media.

Participants in the programme identify the most pressing and timely issues and then collaborate to find the most appropriate ways to cover these in their publications or broadcasts. The program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

By participating in women’s Edition, editors and producers will have an opportunity to become part of an international network of leading women journalists interested in women’s health and development.

In 1998, PRB will host two Women’s Edition seminars that will examine key topics in women’s health, development, and population, and will include editorial meetings to develop strategies for covering these issues.

The first week-long seminar of Women’s Edition will be hosted in Washington, D.C. on March 2 to 6 1998. At that time, PRB will invite the Women’s Edition participants to identify the site and theme of the subsequent seminar which will take place in late July or early August 1998.

Applications may be sent to Julia Beamish, Women’s Edition coordinator, Population Reference Bureau, 1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 520, Washington, D.C. 20009, U.S.A. Tel: (202) 483-1100, fax: (202) 328-3937, E-mail: jbeamish@prb.org

PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS

Three Women Win “Courage In Journalism” Awards

The International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) has awarded three women its “Courage in Journalism “Awards for this year for demonstrating “Extraordinary qualities in pursuing their craft under difficult and often dangerous circumstances.”

The winners of the awards which were presented on October 21 in New York in the United States, are Bina Baktiati, an Indonesian freelance journalist covering political issues in Jakarta, who writes a column for D & r news magazine. She worked with Tempo news weekly until it was banned in 1994, and then went on the help found the Institute for the Study of Free Flow of Information (ISAI), an IFEX member.

Another recipient of the award is Mexican journalist Maribel Guiterrez Moreno, co-founder of El Sur newspaper and a correspondent with La Jornada newspaper. Her coverage of the 1995 Aguas Blancas massacre of 17 unarmed peasants by police helped reveal the government’s role in the killings; and she is currently on a “blacklist” for reporting on a local peasant group opposed to the government.

The third “courage” award goes to United States photographer Corinne Dufka, Reuter’s chief photographer in East Africa, who is based in Kenya. She is admired for her past work during the wars in El Salvador and the former Yugoslavia.

The IWMF also honoured Nancy Woodhull, a founding editor of USA today, posthumously with a “Lifetime Achievement Award”. The IWMF recognized Woodhull, who died of cancer earlier this year, “for her outstanding commitment to quality journalism and as a champion of women’s advancement in the media. “Woodhull was also senior vice president/communications for The Freedom Forum and vice chair of the IWMF.

The IWMF’s yearly Courage in Journalism award recognized women journalists who have risked their lives to practice their craft.

Since its first award ceremony in 1990, the IWMF has honoured a number of African Women journalists for their heroic work. The ceremonies are held in New York city, Washington D.C. and Los Angeles in the United States.
Former recipients include Chris Anyanwu, the jailed editor-in-chief of The Sunday Magazine (TSM) in Nigeria; Horria Saihi, a television producer in Algeria; and Catherine Gicheru of The Nation in Kenya.

In November 1996, the IWMF also honoured two Africans – Lucy Sichone, a legal columnist at The Post in Zambia, and Saida Ramadan, an exiled reporter from the Sudan writing in Cairo (IFEX).

**Chris Anyanwu, 5 Others Receive CPJ’s Press Freedom Awards**

On October 23, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) presented its 1997 International Press freedom Awards to six courageous journalists, including Chris Anyanwu, who have provided independent news coverage and opinions in the face of arrest, imprisonment, violence, and threats of death.

The winners who attended the ceremony in New York, the United States, were Ying Chan of the U.S. and Shieh Chung-liang of Taiwan; Viktor Ivancic of Croatia; Yelena Masyuk of Russia; and Freedom Neruba of Ivory Coast.

An award was presented in absentia to Chris Anyanwu, imprisoned editor-in-chief of the Nigerian Independent news weekly, The Sunday Magazine (TSM). She is serving a 15-year jail term following her conviction in July 1995 by a special military tribunal after an unfair trial on charges of treason arising from stories published by her magazine.

At the awards dinner, CPJ asked the more than 800 people in attendance to sign a petition to Nigeria’s Head of State, Gen Sani Abacha, urging the immediate release of Anyanwu, who is in poor health.

CPJ’s Executive Director, Mr. William Orme, told those gathered at the ceremony that the award and petitions were the beginning of their campaign to secure Anyanwu’s release and that the petitions would be delivered by CPJ officials to the Nigerian Government as well as to Nigerian diplomats in New York, Washington D.C. and elsewhere in the world “to try to impress upon them the damage being done to Nigeria’s image by her continued imprisonment.”

He said: “We implore the government of General Sani Abacha to expedite her immediate release. If the government of Nigeria is sincere in its desire not to become a pariah state…a very good start would be to release Christine Anyanwu and her three imprisoned colleagues.”

Ayanwu’s award was received on her behalf by Bill Killer, managing editor of the New York Times.

Turkish journalist Ocak Isik Yurtcu, a 1996 CPJ award winner, was also at the ceremony, as he was in jail during last year’s ceremony. Yurtcu and five other editors were released from prison in August.

Ted Koppel, anchor and managing editor of ABC television’s ‘Nightline’, received CPJ’s Burton Benjamin Memorial award for his contributions to the cause of press freedom. Legendary U.S. broadcast news producer Fred W. Friendly received a special tribute. (IFEX)

**Namibian Editor Wins MISA Press Freedom Award**

The Namibian newspaper editor, Gwen Lister, was last month named winner of the 1997 Press Freedom Award of the Media Institute of Southern African (MISA) at its conference and Annual General Meeting held in Victoria Falls Town, Zimbabwe.

Lister was honoured for “her unfailing commitment to a free and independent media over the past year as demonstrated by the numerous editorials and news articles in her newspaper exposing and criticizing the Government in her country for its lack of transparency and open governance. This commitment is all the more remarkable given this person’s international reputation in the year’s preceding her country’s independence, for appearing to be closely aligned to the liberation movement which is now the ruling party.”
Upon accepting the award at the conference held in October 6 to 8, Lister said that, in 1990, the struggles of her people won Namibia its political independence, but that this “did not automatically” guarantee democracy.

“Most of our journalists worked hard and courageously, but it’s the second liberation (democratic governance) which is more difficult,” she said, because “you are working with the people you helped and fought to get to power but who now regard you as an enemy, because you criticize them.”

The MISA press freedom award is given annually to individuals in the region who have distinguished themselves in the fight for media freedom in Southern Africa. Previous winners include Basildon Peta of Zambia and Alister Sparks of South Africa. (IFEX)

Submissions Wanted for World Press Photo Contest

The World Press Photo Foundation is calling for submissions for the next World Press Photo Consent. Each year in September, over 150,000 entry forms are distributed worldwide inviting professional press photographers, press agencies, newspapers and magazines to submit the best news-related pictures of the year.

First, second and third prizes are awarded in nine categories for photo stories as well as single images. The categories are spot news, the arts, general news, daily life, people in the news, portraits, sports, science and technology, and nature and the environment.

The World Photo of the Year will honour the photographer whose photograph is regarded as the photojournalistic encapsulation of the year. The award carries a cash prize of NLG 15,000 (about US$7,500) and an invitation to Amsterdam, the Netherlands to attend the annual award ceremony.

The deadline for submission of applications is January 23, 1998. An international jury composed of nine photo editors, photographers and representatives of agencies will evaluate the submissions.

The winners will be announced on February 13, 1998 in Amsterdam.

For further information, or to obtain an entry for, contact Sam Mbure or Emily Nyanjugu at the Network for the Defence of Independent Media in Africa (NDIMA), P.O. Box: 70147, Nairobi’ Kenya, tel/fax: +254 154 41403, e-mail: ndima@arcc.or.ke internet: http://www.oneworld.org/ndima/ (IFEX).

IAPA Receives ALDHU Award for Defending Press Freedom

The Inter American Press Association (IAPA) was honoured last month with the Latin American Association for Human Rights’ (ALDHU) Mons. Leonidas Proano Award.

The award, which is given annually to “defenders of freedom, peace, justice and human rights in the Americas,” was presented to IAPA on October 10 in Quito, Ecuador at the ALDHU headquarters.

The ALDHU praised IAPA’s “constant struggle to defend freedom of information and press freedom,” and commended IAPA for confronting “governments and tyrannies without preconditions” and never wavering “in the face of official pressures or threats.”

The ALDHU also honourd Danilo Arbila, publisher of Busqueda weekly newspaper in Montevideo, Uruguay, for his “extraordinary work over the last three years as chairman of the IAPA committee on Freedom of the Press and Information.”

The award is named after its founder, an Ecuadoran bishop to honour his humanitarian work with indigenous peoples of the Andean mountains of Ecuador. (IFEX)

War Correspondents Awarded Bayeux Prizes

Journalists from different parts of the world were awarded the Bayeux Prize for war correspondents on October 18 in Bayeux, France, according to the Paris-based press freedom group, reporters sans frontiers (RSF).
The winners are Santiago Lyon of Associated Press (AP) for photography; Francois Clemenceau of “Europe 1” for radio coverage; Bob Coen of the Cable News Network (CNN) for television coverage; and collectively to the team of the Agenca France Presse (AFP) bureau in Algiers, Algier, for print coverage.

Both Clemenceau and the AFP team of Alain Bommenel, Bobker Blekadi and Amer Ouali, were honoured for coverage in Algeria. Lyon was honoured for coverage in Afghanistan and Coen was honoured for his work in Liberia.

Along with the award, recipients were given F. 50,000 (US$8,500)

The awards, the only ones in the world to honour was correspondents in all categories of media, were created in 1994 on the 50th anniversary of the landing of the allied troops in Normandy. The awards pay tribute to journalists who work in dangerous conditions to report important news that is integral to freedom and democracy. (IFEX)

Jailed Vietnamese Editor Wins Golden Pen Freedom Award

Doan Viet Hoat, an imprisoned Vietnamese editor, has been awarded the 1998 Golden Pen of Freedom, the World Association of Newspapers’ (WAN) annual prize for outstanding contributions to the cause of press freedom.

Announcing the prize at its meeting on islanbul, Turkey, the Board of Wan paid tribute to the “extraordinary commitment and courage shown by Mr. Doan in the fight for freedom of expression in Vietnam.”

WAN said, “Doan Viet Hoat has made an immense personal sacrifice for his principles, spending 19 of the past 21 years in prison for this declarations and writing in favour of democracy.”

According to WAN, “Mr. Doan was first jailed for calling for economic reforms in 1976. Soon after his release from a labour camp in 1988. Mr. Doan launched “Dien Dan Tu Do” (“Freedom Forum”) to renew his calls for greater freedom of expression. This led to his arrest in 1990 and his sentence to a further 15 years in jail in 1993.’

WAN called upon the Vietnamese Government to release Hoat.

The WAN Golden Pen of Freedom will be presented at the 51st World Newspaper Congress and 5th World Editors Forum Conference on June 1, 1998 in Kobe, Japan.

For further information, contact Peter Whitehead at WAN, 25, rue d’Astorg, 75008 Paris, France, tel: +33 1 47 42 85 00, fax +33 1 47 42 49 48, e-mail: pwhite@nemo.geis.com. (IFEX).

ICFJ Seeks Nominations For Knight Fellowship Programme

The International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) in Washington D.C. in the United States, is calling for nominations for the Knight International Press Fellowships Programme. The Programme sends U.S. news media professionals to work with their colleagues overseas.

According to the ICFJ, “The purpose of the program is one of mutual benefit to help international colleagues nurture the development of a strong and free press, and to enhance understanding among American news professionals of the press and culture in countries throughout the world.”

The Knight International Press Fellowship Programme was started in 1993 with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

The fellowship last from two to nine months, depending upon the needs and circumstances of the selected countries’ media. Partner organizations are usually training centers and universities, where training is available to a variety of print or broadcast journalists.

Partner organizations have been located principally in Eastern and Central Europe, the Newly Independent States, Latin America, Asia and Africa. Fellows are experienced U.S. media professionals with outstanding achievement in the journalistic arena of in any of the related technical, management, and business aspects of the media.

The programme invites applications from potential Fellows and partner organizations overseas for the next deadline of January 15, 1998.
Mumia Abu-Jamal Wins “media heroes” Award

Imprisoned United States journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal was one of the winners last month of the 1997 top Ten Media Heroes, presented at the second Media and Democracy congress, held by the Institute for Alternative Journalism in New York, U.S.A. Alternative Journalism in New York, U.S.A. The ceremony was held on October 18.

Abu-Jamal, an award-winning journalist who has been on death-row since 1982 for allegedly shooting a police officer – a crime he says he did not commit and for which he was unfairly tried, was honoured for his writing and radio shows, which have brought attention to the plight of death row prisoners worldwide.

As part of the Pacifica Network’s “Democracy Now” series, a dozen of Abu-Jamal’s commentaries were to air in February, prior to the contract being cancelled by WRTI-FM and 12 affiliates. The commentaries were taped in prison by the Prison Radio Project in October 1996 on assignment for Index on Censorship.

Ten days later, according to CCPJ, “the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections banned journalists from audio recording, videotaping, or photographing any inmate in a state rule.”

Other winners of the Media Heroes Award include Amy Goodman, on-air host of “Democracy Now”, scholar and author Herb Schiller, “a pioneer of media criticism,” investigative reporter Gary Webb, who uncovered the CIA’s alleged involvement in importing crack cocaine in the San Jose Mercury News; bob Herbert, the only African American voice on the New York Times Op-Ed page; and author and columnist. Norman Solomon.

A lifetime achievement award was also given to James Weinstein, founding publisher and editor of in these Times. (IFEX).

Journalism Training Programmes

Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship

The Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship (AFPF) is inviting applications from professional print journalists from developing countries and emerging democracies for its six months fellowship programme in the United States.

Each year, the AFPF awards approximately 10 six-month fellowships to print journalists from developing and transitional countries with an emerging free press. The programme is designed to give fellows in-depth practical introduction to the U.S. print media.

At the heart of the fellowship is a five-month working assignment at a newspaper or news magazine where fellows contribute to the routine output of their host publications by working as general assignment reporters.

AFPF places each fellow at a single news organization where he or she functions as a staff reporter, covering primarily local news and features. Typically, a fellow will work on the publication’s city desk but may rotate among other desks such as arts, business, features, sports, etc, thereby providing a fellowship with breadth as well as depth.

The programme begins in June with a two-week Orientation Seminar in Washington D.C. the seminar introduces fellows to U.S. journalistic practices and prepares them for living and working in the United States. Fellows also gather for Mid-term and Final seminars to compare their experiences, evaluate their fellowships and discuss their impressions of the U.S. media.

The fellowship covers all cost of programme related international and domestic U.S. travel, and provides a monthly stipend to cover a fellow’s basic living expenses.
The programme was created endowed in 1983 by Alfred Friendly, the Pulitzer prize winning journalist and managing editor of The Washington Post. A hallmark of the late Alfred Friendly life and a strong, free press is essential to the healthy functioning of a democracy. Acting on this belief, he conceived a programme that would impart American journalistic traditions and respond to worldwide interest in the dissemination of fair and accurate news.

Alfred Friendly set three primary objectives for the fellowship program, namely to:

- enable fellows to gain a practical understanding of the function and significance of the free press in American society;
- provide fellows with experience in reporting, writing, and editing that will enhance future professional performance; and
- foster continuing ties between free press institutions and journalists in the United States and their counterparts in other countries.

The criteria for eligibility are an excellent command of written and spoken English, early to mid-career status with at least three years of professional experience as a print journalist, a demonstrated personal commitment to a career in journalism in the home country, and current employment as a journalist with an independent print media organization in his or her country of citizenship. However, a typical AFPF fellow is approximately 29 years old with six years of print journalism experience and no previous experience in the United States.

Applications forms are available from the AFPF office until January 1, 1998. For detailed instructions and application materials, applicants may contact Alfred Friendly Press Fellowships, 2000 L Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington D.C. 20036-4997, U.S.A. Tel: 202-416-1691, fax: 202-416-1695, e-mail: afpf@aol.com

Completed applications must be received at the AFPF office on or before February 1, 1998.

**African Centre for Journalists and Communicators Training**

The African Centre for Journalists and Communicators Training (CAPJC) in Tunis, the Tunisian capital, offers a three-week professional development course for foreign journalists from African, Arab and other developing countries.

The course is meant for working journalists of between the ages of 21 and 35 years of age with at least two years experience in journalism.

Courses taken during the programme include newspaper reporting, newspaper writing, news agency journalism; radio journalism; television journalism; word processing; desktop publishing; English training and typing.

The Centre also offers a five-day and evening course for Tunisian journalists.

Prospective applicants may contact the Director, Ridha Najar, at African Centre for Journalists and Communicators Training, 9, rue Hooker Doolittle, 1002 Tunis – Belvedere, Tunisia, Tel: (216-1) 289-616, (216-1) 781-221. Telex: 18022 TN.

**Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship programme**

The Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Programme, a Fulbright Exchange Activity funded by the United States Congress through the U.S. Information Agency, provides grants for one year of study for mid-career professionals from developing countries, East and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union.


The one year grants are awarded competitively to professional candidates in a variety of fields including print and broadcast journalism for one year of non-degree post-graduate study and related professional experiences in the U.S.

Further information can be obtained from the United States Information Service, the United States Embassy, or the Fulbright Commission or from the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship
We Must Never forget Them!

- Chris Anyanwu, publisher and editor-in-chief of The Sunday Magazine (TSM), held in Kaduna Prison, Kaduna State.
- Kunle Ajibade, editor of The News magazine, held in Makurdi Prison, in Benue State
- George Mbah, assistant editor of Tell Magazine, held in Biu Prison, in Yobe State.
- Ben Charles Obi, editor of the Weekend Classique, held at Agodi Prison in Ibadan, Oyo State.

Each of these four journalists is serving a 15-year jail term following their conviction in July 1995 by a special military tribunal after unfair secret trials on charges of treason arising from stories published by their news magazines.

Join the campaign for their release!

The Media Rights Agenda (MRA) is an independent, non-governmental organization established in August 1993 for the purpose of:

b. Providing protection and support for journalists and writers engaged in the lawful pursuit of their professional duties.
c. Promoting the highest standards of professionals ethics, integrity, training and conduct in the journalism profession; and
d. Bringing about conductive social and legal atmosphere for the practice of journalism, and in particular, ensuring the protection of the journalist’s right not to be compelled to work against his or her conviction or disclose sources of information.

In pursuing its objectives, the MRA seeks to ensure compliance by governments and other private or governmental organisations with relevant provisions in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Africa Charter on Human and People’s Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international human rights instruments.

The MRA is a component of the FEDERC FOUNDATION which is registered under Nigerian Law.

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Media Rights Agenda,
24, Mbonu Ojike Close, Surulere,
P.O. Box 52113, Ikoyi,
Lagos, Nigeria.
Tel: 234-1-860456
Fax: 234-1-862412
E-mail: mra@rcl.nig.com