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Media Closures in Nigeria
Newspapers Battle to Stabilize Two Years After

In 1994, the present regime followed a 26 year-old tradition of military governments the banning of newspapers. This time, the Concord, the Punch and The Guardian groups fell victims when their premises were sealed off and all their publications subsequently proscribed by decree.

But two years after they reopened for business, none of the organizations has quite attained its former level. Buffeted by a hostile economic environment, maneuvering in a minefield of political uncertainties and faced with a constraint threat of being sent out in the cold once more, the newspaper houses battle to stabilize.

Brigadier Adeyinka Adebayo, then Military Governor of the Western State, introduced the practice of banning newspapers in Nigeria in 1968 when he prohibited the sale, distribution or possession of two weekly newspapers known as the Sunday Star and the Imole Owuro and declared the printers and publishers to be unlawful society.

Since April, 6, 1987, when the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, also followed the tradition, proscribed the Newswatch magazine, virtually every major independent newspaper and news magazine in Nigeria has been shut down by security agents at some point or proscribed by the Federal Military Government for periods ranging from a few days to 18 months.

To underscore the lack of tolerance for dissenting viewpoints, which has been responsible for all the closures and proscriptions, newspaper companies owned by five states governments which were then presided over by civilian governors in the dying days of the Babangida Administration, were also affected by the Federal Government’s proscription orders. They are Sketch Press Limited in Ibadan, publishers of the Daily Sketch, Sunday Sketch, and the
vernacular newspaper, Ghoungboun, and the Bendel City, publishers of *The Observer* and *Sunday Observer*.

In the last eight years, a total of 35 newspapers published by 12 media companies were either shut down or proscribed while nine news magazines published by six companies were also affected.

*The Concord* and *Punch* groups have been the most frequent victims. About 14 newspapers and magazines published by concord Press Nigeria Limited; its sister company, Africa Concord Limited; and Punch Nigeria Limited were either shut down or proscribed three times within a period of five years. Ten others published by Guardian Newspapers Limited, Guardian Magazines Limited, Punch Nigeria Limited and Bendel Newspapers Corporation, suffered either forced closures or proscriptions twice within the same period.

Besides depriving millions of Nigerians of their right to receive information and ideas without interference, such proscriptions or closures leave media houses and the journalists who work in them totally helpless and at the hands of the military.

The media organizations suffer huge financial losses from their inability to do business while continuing to service some of their overhead costs. For the journalists, many of them who cannot be absorbed by the surviving media organizations turn beggars, roaming the streets to find means of providing for themselves and their families. And as the case of Concord show, many of them have lost their lives in the process.

In the last episode of this recurring drama, between 3.00 am and 4.00 am in the night of June 11, 1994, three teams of armed policemen, led by operatives of the State Security Service (SSS) simultaneously raided the premises of Concord and Punch newspapers as well as the African Concord magazine, drove out the workers, who were in the process of producing the next day’s edition of the respective publications, and sealed off the premises. At about mid-night on August 15, 1994, a similar action was carried out at the premises of *The Guardian* newspapers.

It is estimated that this action resulted in loss of jobs for over 3,500 journalists and other media workers who were employed in the three major media groups. Concord alone accounted for about 1,200 of these.

Early in September 1994, the Federal Government published three decrees by which it proscribed 20 newspapers and magazines published by five companies in the three newspaper groups for an initial period of six months. The decrees were titled Concord Newspapers and Africa Concord Weekly Magazine (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree No. 6 of 1994; and The Guardian Newspapers and Africa Guardian Weekly Magazine (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree No. 8 of 1994. Upon the expiration of the six months period, the Head of State, General Sani Abacha, issued three statutory instruments to further extend the proscription for another six months.

The initial reason given for the closure of the premises of the Concord and the Punch was that the police had information that they were being used to stockpile arms and ammunition. The claim formed the basis of the government’s defence at the Federal High Court in Lagos in the suits instituted by Concord press and African Concord Limited challenging the closure of their premises.

Both in its deposition before the court and in the oral arguments presented by its lawyers, the government claimed that the policemen invaded the premises of the newspapers so they could investigate the information on arms storage. But the lawyers admitted that no such arms or ammunition were fond on the premises after an extensive search.

Subsequently, various government officials, including General Abacha, accused the newspapers of irresponsibility and threatening the peace and unity of the country with their publications. But none of them cited any article or series of articles published by the newspapers in support of this allegation.

Faced with the possibility that its premises would remain closed indefinitely and that billions of naira worth of equipment and printing facilities would go to waste. The guardian
publisher, Mr. Alex Ibru, led a team of senior management officials of the organization to Abuja early in July 1995 to plead for the reopening of the premises.

But after the Federal Government announced the de-proscription of The Guardian newspapers on July 14, 1995; the newspaper company was unable to restart production immediately and remained out of circulation until October 1. Some of its equipment and facilities had been looted or vandalized despite the fact that armed security agents of the government were stationed at the company’s premises throughout the period of the forced closure. Those equipment that were not vandalized had gone into disrepair.

The management of the newspaper said it had to fly in engineers from the United Kingdom to undertake the repairs of its printing facilities and import spare parts for the exercise. Despite huge profits reportedly recorded by the company prior to the closure and proscription, the management also complained about the inadequacy of its resources for the task of restarting its operations and had to source loans to finance the cost of resuming operations.

The company could also not recall all its former employees that were willing to return. Those that came back were recalled in batches because the management said it had no money to begin paying salaries at a go for all its former employees even when it was clear that only a fraction of its former work force would be returning.

When the printing machines finally started rolling again on October 1, 1995, only two of the former six newspaper and magazine titles made it back. Prior the closure, the group comprising Guardian Newspapers Limited (GNL) and Guardian Magazines Limited (GML), published The Guardian (daily newspaper), Lagos Life (weekly newspaper), Financial Guardian (weekly newspaper), Guardian Express (daily evening newspaper), and the Africa Guardian (weekly magazine).

Two years after the reopening of the premises, only The Guardian and The Guardian on Sunday are being published by the organization although the Saturday paper was later turned into a full fledged titled called The Guardian on Saturday.

The situation of the organisation has been worsened by a series of misfortunes which it has suffered since the reopening. As it battled to find its feet 10 weeks after it resumed operations, unknown persons attempted on December 16, 1995 to burn down the premises by setting fire on the main building at a portion housing its circulation department at about 3.00am. The quick action of the company’s staff and fire-fighters called in saved the entire premises from being razed down.

Again, two months later, in February 1996, Alex Ibru, owner of The Guardian group and a former Minister of Internal Affairs under the Abacha regime, was shot at point-blank range by unidentified gunmen who trailed him. He sustained gunshot injuries in the head and body and had to be flown to the United Kingdom for surgery. Media Rights Monitor learnt that despite the six-hour surgery by specialists which saved his life, he lost an eye and two fingers as a result of the attack. He has remained in self-exile in the U.K. since then.

The Managing Director of GNL, Mr. Lade Bonuola, declined to speak to the Media Rights Monitor on the travails of the organization saying the injuries that have been inflicted on it were still to fresh. “It is not yet to talk about the problems”, he said.

Pressed to give an insight into how the organization has coped with the problems of the last two years, he queried: “Where do you want me begin? Is it the closure the attempt to burn down this place, or the attempt on the life of Mr. Ibru?” But Bonuola gave assurance that the issues would be thrown open for discussion one day as they cannot be swept under the carpet forever.

Besides the effect of the year-long closure, the combination of the attempted arson and assassination bid on Ibru have served to place the organization under added financial burden which have slowed down its growth. For instance, Media Rights Monitor learnt that the company has been spending considerable sums of money in flying senior officials and Board members to London to meet with or brief Ibru on its operations.
An enormous amount of money was also spent in re-building the portion of the company premises burnt during the arson attempt of December 1995 and in replacing lost equipment and facilities.

The process of reviving the equipment and facilities damaged from long periods of disuse or vandalism is still going on, gulping huge sums of money.

The company has since suspended its yearly anniversary celebration and annual Lecture which was a major media event. Media Rights Monitor learnt that the lecture series were being put on hold pending the return of Ibru to the country which, form the look of things, seems unlikely in the near future.

Despite the problems and the difficulties, the editorial quality of the newspaper remains high. But how it will cope in the future and whether it will be able to bring back the four newspaper and magazine titles which are still suspended remain to be seen.

By the time the Federal Government announced the de-proscription of the Concord group during the Independence Anniversary broadcast of General Abacha on October 1, 1995, Concord publisher, Chief Moshood Abiola, had been in detention for over one year. The organization was therefore faced with the task of mobilizing the financial resources to being operations in his absence.

Besides Abiola’s extensive personal re-sources and huge business influence from which Concord Press would have benefited enormously, his present political circumstance has also had adverse consequences for the organization. It has also had to operate under close observations from those who were concerned that it might “fall out of line” again in championing Abiola’s opinion interests. The newspaper group was therefore faced from the onset with a tough dilemma of whether to immediately launch a campaign for Abiola’s release and in vindication of his political interests and thereby risk incurring the wrath of the government once more, or impose some self-restraint to avoid being shut down again. It has skillfully walked the tight rope since it began publication following the de-proscription.

But it is a measure of the pressure which the Concord group has come under that it decided to apologise and settle out of court of the 450 million naira libel suits which nine Supreme Court justices, including former Chief Justice Muhammadu Lawal Uwais, instituted against Concord Press Nigeria Limited since January 1994 over a number of stories published by the Weekend Concord on December 11, 1993.

Before the closure and subsequent proscription of Concord, the newspaper organization vigorously defended the suits, promising in its statement of defence to prove the veracity of the allegations contained in the offending story.

It was therefore something of a surprise when late year, Concord made a *volte face* and opted to apologise to the justices over the story, admitting in the process that it was false, and agreeing to pay an unspecified sum of money as damages to Justice Bello to bring the litigation to an end.

The Chairman of the Editorial Board of Concord Press Nigeria Limited, Mr. Segun Babatope, told Media Rights Monitor that the losses to the organization as a result of the proscription were “gigantic” in terms of material and human resources. For instance, by the time it was reopened, eight members of its staff had died in circumstances which could be traced to the closed while many of its machines were damaged.

Linking the death of the Concord staff to the closure, Babatope said “Obviously, some of them died as a result of ill-health. If you no longer have a means of livelihood, it compromises your life expectancy. That was what happened. Some of them resorted to traveling here and there in a bid to make ends meet and in the process they got killed through road accidents. If they had been in their duty posts here, that would not have happened. Those are the reasons that occasioned what I will call their untimely deaths which could have been avoided if the closure had not taken place.”
He estimates that Concord Press has spent over 30 million naira to resume operations and was still spending to re-kit its machines because “the long shutdown has adversely affected our machinery.” It would take some more time for it to fully recover from the effects of the closure.

Prior to its closure and subsequent proscription, the Concord group published more titles than any other independent media organization in the country. However, it has been able to resume the publication of virtually all its newspapers published in local languages.

Although Babatope admits that Abiola’s incarceration has had limited adverse consequences for the operations of the newspapers and magazine published by the group, he said the management has had to cope with the fact that many people do not want to advertise in the Concord so as not to be seen Abiola whom the government views as an enemy.

According to him, “some (people) do not want to offend government by patronizing us. That has affected us in a way. But we have people, friends, who have stood by us, who are not unnecessarily worried by what might be the impression of government if their adverts are placed in *Concord*.”

The Punch group was de-proscribed on October 1, 1995 at the same time with the *Concord* newspapers. About 17 days later, it was back on the newsstands. But it was not itself without problems.

The newspaper company also had to contend with facilities that had gone into a rot upon reopening. For instance, the unceremonious manner in which its printing machines, the major asset of the newspaper, were shut down and abandoned affected their functioning after the place was reopen.

According to Mr. Demola Osinubi, managing director of the Punch Group of Newspapers, “The circumstances of our being forced out of the premises were such that we could not clear the machines after every printing process, the machines require cleaning to ensure that the rollers are free of ink. The result was that after 19 months, the rollers which were used were not cleaned. That was one of the major problems.” Up to late last year, the company was still trying put the machines in perfect working condition.

The newspaper also had difficulty getting its old hands back. In the dark days of the closure, it had to lay off all its workers as there was no money to keep on paying their salaries when the company was not doing business. Many of the workers had left journalism while some others took up employment in other media organizations.

Osinubi said Punch lost 30 per cent of its former staff as a result of this problem. Upon reopening therefore, the organization was short-staffed which placed enormous work pressure on those who had returned as they had to work hours on end daily to meet up. In fact, according to the managing director, “initially, the staff strength we had in 1995, in October 1995, up to 1996, will not even be able to spread over all the titles. We had to use all available staff to work on the *Punch*, *Saturday Punch* and the *Sunday Punch*.”

For Osinubi, it is an impossible task to estimate the cost of Punch returning to the newsstands after the closure. All he could says was that “it was at a terrible cost.”

One of the publications of the group *Toplife*, remains in abeyance up till today. Osinubi explained that the reopening of the Punch group was for purely business reasons: during the period of the closure, some new publications had entered the newspaper market and the Punch management felt that since it could barely cope with resuming publication of the Punch, it would be setting an impossible task for itself by attempting to re-introduce *Toplife* when it lacked the personnel to take on the additional burden that would be involved and the resources to carry the cost.

But Osinubi insists that the closures which Punch has suffered in the last few years “have not succeeded in cowing anybody” but has rather strengthened the newspaper.

He said: “The closures have strengthened us further. That’s the way I look at it. Take a look at the Punch from the time we returned up till now. I feel proud to say that the Punch has not deviated from what it used to do. Punch is the Punch. It cannot be any other newspaper. All these closures have not succeeded in cowing anybody.”
Charter for a Free Press

A free press means a free people. To this end, the following principles, basic to an unfettered flow of news and information both within and across national borders, deserve the support of all those pledged to advance and protect democratic institutions.

1. Censorship, direct or indirect, is unacceptable; thus laws and practice restricting the right of the media freely to gather and distribute information must be abolished, and government authorities, national or local, must not interfere with content of print or broadcast news, or restrict access to any news source.

2. Independent news media, both print and broadcast, must be allowed to emerge and operate freely in all countries.

3. There must be no discrimination by governments in their treatment, economic or otherwise, of the news media within a country. In those countries where government media also exist, the independent media must have the same free access as the official media have to all material and facilities necessary to their publishing or broadcasting operations.

4. States must not restrict access to newsprint, printing facilities and distribution systems, operation of news agencies, and availability of broadcast frequencies and facilities.

5. Legal, technical and tariff practice by communication authorities which inhibit the distribution of news and restrict the flow of information are condemned.

6. Government media must enjoy editorial independence and be open to a diversity of viewpoints. This should be affirmed in both law and practice.

7. There should be unrestricted access by the print and broadcast media within a country to outside news and information services, and the public should enjoy similar freedom to receive foreign publications and foreign broadcasts without interference.

8. National frontiers must be open to foreign journalists. Quotas must not apply, and applications for visas, press credentials and other documentation requisite for their work should be approved promptly. Foreign journalists should be allowed to travel freely within a country and have access to both official and unofficial news sources, and be allowed to import and export freely all necessary professional materials and equipment.

9. Restrictions on the free entry to the field of journalism or over its practice, through licensing or other certification procedures, must be eliminated.

10. Journalists, like all citizens, must be secure in their persons and be given full protection of law. Journalists working in war zones are recognized as civilians enjoying all rights and immunities accorded to other civilians.

About the Charter


The conference was held by the World Press Freedom Committee, with the cooperation of the international Federation of Newspaper Publisher (FIEJ), now World Association, North American National Broadcasters Association and the International Federation of the Periodical Press.

The provisions embody a wide consensus of principles necessary to ensure free, independence news media. The Charter has been cited approvingly at Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and other meetings, formally endorsed by UNESCO’s Director-General and supported by a number of journalistic organizations around the world.

Our Loss Has Been Colossal, Says Concord Editorial Board Chairman

The Chairman of the Editorial Board of the Concord Group of Newspapers, Mr. Segun Babatope, spoke to the Media Rights Monitor on how the organization has fared since its return. Here are excerpts from the interview:
It is now three years since the closure of the Concord Group of newspapers. Since the re-opening two years ago, how has it been?

I think it has been well with us. We have been trying to grapple with a most difficult and daunting terrain, but notwithstanding, I believe the odds have toughened us, except for the very serious economic climate which as reduced the resources available to the newspapers. I think professionally we are grappling with the odds.

At the time of the re-opening of the Concord group, it was obviously difficult to assess the total loss in monetary terms. Have you now been able to put together the loss in figures?

The loss has been gigantic, I must confess that to you, in terms of material and human resources. By the time we returned, many of our machines had become damaged. About eight members of our staff died, many more resigned, who felt that they could not cope with the situation. And we have had to lose a lot. Don’t forget that before we were shut down, Concord had a solid clientele. Concord was the largest circulating national newspaper in the entire country. And therefore, for our operations to have been ruptured, there remains the severance of a significant core of our clientele. We have not substantially recovered from that. So in terms of human and material resources, I believe the loss has been most colossal.

Is it possible to point at particular figures financially?

Financially, I think that will run into million of naira. We have done a quantitative analysis of that. We have gone to court to claim damages for the loss suffered during the closure.

You are in court?

Yes. For the closure, because we felt it was unwarranted. Thre was nothing that we did we felt was wrong. And if we had committed any act of infraction, I believe the due process of law ought to have been followed – take Concord to court and if the court so decides that Concord is guilty, of course we accept the judgment of the court. This is why we have gone to the court against the Federal Government. We are very sure we are going to be vindicated at the end of the day.

What is the asset base of Concord. Have you quantified it before and after the closure?

It was difficult for us to quantify at the time and even as at now. Concord has vast resources spread across the country. I mean of you go round the country, you will discover that I defer to modesty. There is no other newspaper in this country that has the resources that Concord has. Some of the resources that you can find in the headquarters, you can find also in the district locations, even in states in which we were then minimally represented. We invested a lot in resources. You know our chairman (Chief Moshood Abiola) very well. We invested a lot in resources to ensure that at least Concord could be gotten in virtually every segment in Nigeria. And before you do that, you ought to have put in place a formidable logistical support. Our resources then and now still run into billions of naira, but one cannot really put his fingers on a specific amount.

Can you give an estimate of what it took Concord to come back to the newsstands after the closure?

Again, it is difficult to say the exact amount that we have put in because it is a continuous process. It will take us sometime before we fully recover from it. Before we came back to the newsstands, we had spent over 30 million naira to ensure that we meet the day to day requirement, and we are still spending because, obviously, the long shutdown has adversely affected our machinery and the staff also. It is going to take us a little more time before we fully recover. We are going to train staff and adequately kit the machines that we have.

How do you link the death of some of your staff members to the closure?

Oh yes! Obviously, some of them died as result of ill-health. If you no longer have a means of livelihood, it compromises your life expectancy. That was what happened. Some of them resorted to travelling here and there in a bid to make ends meet and in the process they got
killed through road accidents. If they had been in their duty posts here, that would not have happened. Those are the reasons that occasioned what I will call their untimely deaths which could have been avoided if the closure had not taken place.

**How is the continued detention of your chairman and publisher, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, affecting your operations?**

Well, you know the nature of our society. One should be frank to accept that it has affected us in a limited manner. Not something that will really worry us unduly in terms of people who will want to place adverts who do not want to be identified with Concord whose owner is chief M.K.O. Abiola, now incarcerated by the same government. Some do not want to offend government by patronizing us. That has affected us in a way. But we have people, friends, who have stood by us who are not unnecessarily worried by what might be the impression of government if their adverts are placed in Concord. So we might say it has affected us in a way but it has not been too significant.

**Is there any particular kind of problem you feel that if Chief Abiola were around Concord would not have?**

Obviously, we can do more with the resources that he was given to providing for us from time to time. But then you see, when you are confronted with an adversity, it creates the best out of you. Since he is not around now to provide us with the resources that he used to give to us, we have been left with no choice than to device some other ways by which we can sustain ourselves. That is why you see Concord coming out everyday. Otherwise, it would have been difficult for us to come out everyday. But thank God, we are coming out everyday and we will continue to come out everyday.

**Closures Have Not Succeeded in Cowing Us, Say Punch M.D.**

*Media Rights Monitor spoke with Mr. Demola Osinubi, Managing Director of the Punch Group of Newspapers, on how the newspaper organisation has coped with the aftermath of its long closure. Here are experts from the interview:*

**Two years after the Punch re-opened from an 18-month closure, has any explanation been given as to why the newspapers in the group were proscribed?**

You remember that initially what was said about the Punch was that we were storing arms in this place. Policemen came, all manner of security operatives came, but up till this moment, not one single arm was found here. If you show me a bullet, I may not even be able to identify it until you tell me it is a bullet. It was just a matter of calling a dog a bad name in order to hang it. And so, if the purpose was to hang the Punch at that time, all manner of excuses would be given to justify the closure. That was exactly what happened. Up till this moment, nobody has been forthcoming, and what we believe in is abiding by the law.

**But you were in court?**

We went to court, we won the case, but there is an appeal pending against the judgment.

**On your own, have you been able to find out why the Punch was shut?**

We cannot imagine why. It is best given by the government, but they have not come out with any reason, and I cannot begin to think for them. But if the Punch became a thorn in your flesh, I mean, that’s how I will read it, and you think the Punch won’t allow you to do the things you want to do, to run the State the manner you want to run it, then you will find a way of resting the Punch.

**I want you to look back at the last two years, how has the process of coming back been, getting the papers to the newsstand after the de-proscription?**

It has been challenging, seriously challenging, I must say. Don’t forget that we had to lay off. We were forced to lay off for upwards of 19 months, and for 19 months, we had
machines that were not put to work. And so, the first major task we had to contend with was getting our machines worked on and repaired so that we can get smooth copies from the machines. These were machines that had not worked for some 19 months.

The circumstances of our being forced out of the premises were such that we could not clear the machines and after every printing process, the machines require cleaning, to ensure that the rollers are free of ink. The result was that after 19 months, the rollers which were used were not cleaned. That was one of the major problems.

Of course, the Punch has always been blessed with very dedicated and loyal workers, so it wasn’t difficult for us to put the machines back on track. Once we got the machines to work, we faced another major problem. Most of our staff returning had had employment in other places. And because of the trauma of remaining out of the Punch employment for so long, some of them not earning anything, some of them had taken a decision never to return to journalism. It wasn’t just a question of whether their place of work have since re-opened, but that they had taken decisions not to ever return to any place that had to do with newspaper publishing because of the risk involve.

So, we were not able to get back more than 30 per cent of our normal staff. Some had taken employment in some newspapers and they felt it was morally wrong for them to just abandon those newspapers which provided for them in their hour of distress and then return to the Punch. In some situations, we even encouraged some of our staff who got employment in some other media organizations to do the appropriate thing – that they should resign normally and give them a month’s notice. Those who came to their rescue in times of trouble should not be paid back in such dirty coins. So we encouraged those who want to return to the Punch to resign normally and then return to the Punch, if they so desired.

And so, we allowed ex-staff to return, we gave them up to three months for them to return. It wasn’t after December 31, 1995 that we then decided to start recruiting new staff.

**How long did it take for the Punch to return to the newsstand after the newspapers were de-proscribed?**

Just 17 days. I think it is the earliest we ever had in the history of the forceful closure of newspapers.

**Have you assessed the total cost of getting the Punch back to the newsstands?**

It is a very tough one. How do you begin to look at the cost in terms of what we have lost? People had to work almost 28 hours a day, if that were possible, and then you really had to get people, one person to do the work of three or four persons, you had to go and look for news stories, come back, write and edit the stories, plan the pages and do all manner of things. It was really tough, but if you are coming from a situation of no job for some 19 months and suddenly you are faced with all these challenges, for God’s sake, you won’t even know where all the energy was coming from. We were all working night and day. The Punch spirit was there. In the Punch, we don’t ever consider any challenge too difficult.

**Have you put together the cost of getting the Punch back to the newsstands? The cost of refurbishing the machines, for instance?**

No. it is pretty difficult. It is not a thing you can do. What we did initially is just to get the machines to work, to produce the copies. We didn’t mind that the copies were rough. If you go back to the records, you will discover that those copies we sent out on October 17, 1995 were not perfect copies. They were very rough. We know what we were up to, but the reading public were waiting for us, and we didn’t want to keep them waiting for too long. So we sent those copies out and said well, we will continue working on the machines and so, it was a continuous thing. It wasn’t a question of what we spent initially to get the machines to work. No. Up to late 1996, we still had one thing or the other to do on the machines, and I tell you we have had to change all the rollers and even in one instance, a whole folder was replaced.
You have a figure in mind?  
It was at a terrible cost. It was first repaired and it wasn’t working well. It had another crack, so we had to return it for further repairs.

Toplife, one of the newspapers in the Punch group, has not returned to the newsstands?  
Yes. We took a decision to rest Toplife for new purely business reasons. By the time the Punch was proscribed in 1994, for the second time around, Toplife was just picking up. At the time we were leaving the newsstand forcefully. ThisDay was not on the newsstand, and some other newspapers were not there. While we were away for about 19 months, some other publications came in to fill the gap and the others that were remaining were having a field day. So you were setting yourself on a very difficult task if not impossible if you feel that you will be able to return your Punch, the normal titles (the Punch, the Saturday Punch and that the Sunday Punch, and also come back again with Toplife. We also looked at the cost. Initially, the staff strength we had in 1995, in October 1995, up to 1996 will not even be able to spread over all the titles. We had to use all available staff to work on the Punch. We felt it was not wise to return. Toplife now.

The Punch group has witnessed so many forced closures in the last decade. How much has those closures affected the editorial quality. Is there self-censorship?  
The closures have strengthened us further. That’s the way I look at it. Take a look at the Punch from the time we returned up till now. I feel proud to say that the Punch has not deviated from what it used to do. Punch is the Punch. It cannot be any other newspaper. All these closures have not succeeded in cowing anybody. 

But I must say that the readers are the ones to determine which paper they want, and for what reasons. If you look around, you find that some good newspapers, new newspapers, have joined the others in the newsstands. You have more viable newspapers now. The Diet for example. The Diet came, I looked at it for a whole week and I read it on a daily basis. I can tell you that The Diet is a paper that will survive. It says so much for how large the market is and that is also good for the Nigerian Public.

African Commission to Decide MRA’s Petition in October 

The Africa Commission on Human and People’s Rights in Banjul, The Gambia now expects to give its verdict in October in three complaints lodged before it by the Media Rights Agenda (MRA) against the Nigerian Government over abuses of press freedom.

In a letter written to MRA’s executive director, Mr. Edetaen Ojo, by the Commission’s Legal Officer, Dr. Essombe Edimo Joseph, on behalf of the Secretary, Mr. Germain Baricako, the Commission said it decided at its 21st Ordinary Session, held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, to postpone a decision on the complaints “pending further analysis of the reports from the Commission’s mission to Nigeria.”

Besides, Joseph said, the Commission was awaiting “further submissions of scholarly articles and court cases to assist in its decision making process.”

The first of the petitions, registered as Communication No. 105/93 and lodged by the MRA on September 1, 1993 complained, among other things, that the Newspapers Decree 43 of 1993 violates Articles 7 and 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

In the second, Communication No. 130/94 of January 5, 1994, the MRA is contending that the events of January 2, 1994, when 50,000 copies of TELL magazines were seized by heavily armed policemen and other security officers at the printer’s premises, also violated the provisions of Article 7 and 9 of the African Charter.

In Communication No. 145/95 dated September 7, 1994, the MRA is complaining that the closure and subsequent proscription of The Guardian, the Punch and the Concord groups of newspapers in 1994 violated the rights of the entire people of Nigerian to receive information, particularly from the independent news media.
Although the Commission declared Communication Nos. 105/93 and 130/94 admissible at its 16th session held in Banjul in October 1994, when they came up for hearing at its 17th session in Lome, Togo in March 1995, the Commission decided to delay a final decision on the cases so that they might be taken up with the Nigerian Government when the Commission undertook its mission to Nigeria. The Commission also declared that the chairman of the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) should be informed about the situation in Nigeria.

It also took a similar decision on Communication 145/95 at its 18th session.

A two-man delegation of the Commission comprising its Vice Chairman, Professor Emmanuel Victor Oware Dankwa, and Commissioner Kofi Amega, and accompanied by Joseph visited Nigeria last March to investigate allegations of human rights and to take up with the Federal Government all the cases pending against Nigeria before the Commission. The mission’s report was not ready at the 21st Ordinary Session of the Commission held on April 15 to 24, this year.

Although the Commission had previously scheduled its verdict on the complaints for the 21st session, Joseph said it now expects to take on decision on the merits at its 22nd Session to be held in October.

*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.

**Officers**

Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director  
Tunde Fagbohunlu, Director of Legal Services  
Morenike Ransome-Kuti, Director of Research  
Austin Agbonsuremi, Director of Publications  
Eze Anaba, Director of Projects  
Tive Denedo, Director of Campaigns  
Josephine Izuagie, Treasurer  
Anselm Chidi Odinkalu

**Newsletter Letter**

Austin Agbonsuremi, Editor  
Eze Anaba, Associate Editor  
Felix Ireba, Publications Officer

All correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, *Media Rights Monitor*,  
24. Mbonu Ojike Close, Off Alhaji Masha Road, Surulere,  
P. O. Box 52113, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria.  
Tel: 234-1-860456, Fax: 234-1-862412.  
E-mail: mra@rel.nig.com

**EDITORIAL COMMENT**

It is now two years since the three newspaper groups shut down by the government of General Sani Abacha in 1994 reopened for business. Yet, even on a casual observation, it is obvious that the affected media organizations are yet to fully recover from the experience.
We set out to find out how the organizations have coped in the last two years overcoming the economic difficulties, engendered by the proscriptions and the prevalent socio-political climate in the country. Our findings underscore the senselessness of the decision to proscribe them.

It is clear argument that no other form of control, adopted by the military has been more drastic than the closure of medial facilities or the banning of publications. The twin measures, frequently adopted by successive military governments in the country, have proved to be the most devastating assault on press freedom in the last decade.

Brazen and brutal in their application, such measures have denied millions of Nigerians access to independent news sources, resulted in the deterioration of printing facilities and other equipment and have often created untold hardship for journalists and other media workers who are thereby rendered jobless.

But most importantly, as our report shows, they have posed a serious threat to the ability of the newspapers and magazines to continue to operate even after their reopening.

It is imperative therefore for journalists and all Nigerians who derive information from the news media to learn to say “never again!

Austin Aghonsuremi

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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LETTERS

Amnesty International, Ireland Commends MRA

We write on behalf of our local group of Amnesty International. We are aware of your work for human rights and the dangers it entails for you and your families.

We commend you on your courage and as members of Amnesty International, hope that our work can support you in your struggle towards democracy.

Yours sincerely

Maureen Keavenye and Ciara Dick,
Ireland.

Don’t Give Up the Good Work

My name is Maira Jonsson. I live in Stockholm, Sweden. I just want to express my great admiration of the work you perform. Please don’t give up!

Even though times are tough, I know there are lots of people all over the world supporting you.

Yours sincerely,

Maira Jonsson
Stockholm, Sweden.
ATTACKS ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

SSS Agents Stop HRA Award, Detain Abayomi

The Chairman of the Founder’s Council of Human Rights Africa (HRA), Dr. Tunji Abayomi, was arrested and detained on August 27 by state security agents who stopped the organisation’s plan to hold its Africa Service Award Ceremony scheduled for the next day.

Abayomi was arrested at his office in Yaba, Lagos at about 7.15 pm by five officials of the State Security Service (SSS) on the eve of the proposed conferment of the 1996 African Service Award on Justice Elisabeth Kayissan Pognon, President of the constitutional court of the Republic of Benin.

Earlier that day, Abayomi had led a team of HRA officials to the Nigeria-Benin border to receive Justice Pognon who was scheduled to arrive Nigeria at 11am. But about 30 minutes after her scheduled arrival time, a Benin Republic Embassy official met Abayomi at the border ad told him that Justice Pognon would not be attending the ceremony as she was stopped from coming to Nigeria that morning after she started out. Reports said she was stopped from coming following the Nigerian Government’s disapproval for the ceremony which was conveyed to the Beninois Ambassador to Nigeria, Mrs. Sabiraton Kerimou, the previous day in Abuja.

A reception party earlier scheduled for 6.00pm at the Metropolitan Club in Victoria Island, Lagos on August 28 was cancelled as armed policemen led by SSS officials surrounded the premises of the hotel and sealed it off. That same evening, another team of security agents was also stationed at the Eko Hotel in Victoria Island, where the actual award ceremony was scheduled to take place the next day. The security men remained there until August 29 to ensure that no event took place.

Abayomi was detained and interrogated by security agents until August 30, when he was released without charge or trial.

Security Agents Abort Launch of Book on Abiola


The book, entitled Abiola, Democracy and the Rule of Law, is written by Richard Akinnola, a journalist and chairman of the Centre for Free Speech (CFS). It was to have been launched at 12.00 noon on that day. But reports said as early as 6.00am, armed police men had taken positions at the club house, venue of the launch, barring invited guests from entering the premises. A police inspector reportedly told a journalist that they had been detailed there to ensure that nothing “unusual” happened there. He did not say whom.

In a statement, Akinnola described the action of the security agents as a “new wave of repression of citizens and their freedom of association and expression”, adding that it “does not speak well of the regime’s human rights record”.

Earlier, on August 23 and 24, the premises of the club house were similarly occupied and sealed off by a contingent of armed policemen.

During the siege, journalists and other members of the public who came to patronize the club house were turned back. The policemen gave no reason for the siege, but the NUJ Executive Committee said it gathered that the action was taken by the police authorities to prevent an anticipated opposition press conference on the continued detention of Abiola, winner of the annulled 1993 presidential elections, as part of activities marking his 60th birthday anniversary. August 24 was Abiola’s 60th birthday.

In a petition to the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, the Lagos NUJ Chairman, Lanre Arogundade, said his council had always conducted itself peacefully and responsibly in all its activities, and that the excuse for the siege was baseless.
He said the siege falls in character with the incessant violations of the right of Nigerians to freedom of expression, association, assembly, and the protection of their property from unlawful invasion.

**European Institute Publishes Book on Media’s Role in Democratisation**

The role of the media as a catalyst in the transition to democracy in the 12 countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is the subject of a new book published by the European Institute for the Media (EIM).

The book, entitled Media in the CIS: A Study of the Political, Legislative and Socio-Economic Framework, is published by the EIM under the European Union’s Tacis Democracy Programme.

According to Yasha Lange, who wrote the Overview, the book confirms “the profound interdependence and mutual influencing of politics, economy and the media”. He said “The reciprocal relation is evidenced by the clearly demonstrated correlation between the democratic caliber of a country, economic growth and the freedom and diversity of the media” adding that “the question of freedom constitutes the most intricate problem for the media in the CIS, ranging from censorship and governmental subordination to direct and indirect pressure, to more subtle methods of influence and corporate control.”

A major question in the book is to what extent the media – both state-owned and private – are editorially autonomous, economically independent and free from political pressure or interference. The book attempts to answer this question in each country, nothing that the state of media freedom varies considerably from country to country in the CIS.

**Crimes Against Journalists: Conference Issues Declaration of Repudiation and Action Plan**

The mostly unknown assailants of journalists in the Americas were put “on trials” at the Inter American Press Association’s (IAPA) “Unpunished Crimes Against Journalists Conference”, held in Guatemala City from July 30 to August 1, 1997.

In the last 10 years, according to the IAPA, approximately 170 journalists in the Americas have been killed during the course of their work and in about 90 per cent of these cases, the killer remain at large.

Journalists, academics, politicians and human rights activists from around the world gathered at the conference to seek ways to alleviate the problem of impunity. It was the culmination of IAPA’s three-year project to investigate the unsolved murders of journalists in the Americas, concentrating on six representatives cases in Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala.

The conference was presented in the form of a court trial where victims’ relatives and IAPA investigators acted as witnesses, presenting case details which put the six murders into context and helped to identify those presumed responsible.

David Cozac of the Canadian Committee to Protect Journalists (CCPJ), who attended the conference, said representatives of international press freedom organizations also gave testimony on the murders of journalists worldwide.

A 40-person “Committee of Notables” acted as judge and jury, passing comments on the cases as they were analysed. Members of the committee included Noble Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, former president of Nicaragua.

The six cases IAPA selected for its investigations range from the prominent – such as El Espectador publisher, Guillermo Cano, gunned down in 1896 in Bogota, Colombia – to the less well-known, like Victor Manuel Oropesa, columnist for the newspaper, Diario de Juarez, stabbed in his office in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, in 1991.
The IAPA says these cases are linked by irregularities in the murder investigations, ranging from cover-ups and bribes to violence against witnesses, judges and victims’ relatives.

According to Cozac, in presenting testimony about the 1993 murder in Guatemala of El Grafico publisher, Jorge Carpio, questioned the handling of the investigation as well as the claim by the administration at the time that his murder was carried out by “common criminals.”

If that were the case, de Carpio asked, “Why were the result of the autopsies lost? Why were the files burned? Why were me and my family threatened? Why was the chief of police in El Quiche [where Carpio was murdered] in charge of the case shot to death with two bullets in the back and one in the mouth to make it look like a warning for others to keep quiet?”

IAPA also presented a summary of the successful results of its investigations: all six cases have been formally assigned to the docket of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights of the Organisation of American States (OAS), and government officials from all three countries concerned have either given assurances or made arrangements that these cases will be investigated in a more serious and thorough manner.

The IAPA also reported that the mastermind of the murder of Guillermo Cano was jailed after nearly ten years as a fugitive.

The IAPA achieved three main objectives at the conference. First, a “Declaration of Reputation” was issued setting down the international-recognised right to freedom of expression, and denouncing crimes against journalists and the culture of impunity which surrounds them. Second, recommendations to governments were drawn up and approved calling on governments to ensure due process in the investigations of crimes against journalists and the punishment of those responsible. Finally, representatives of IAPA and several other approved a coordinated “Institutional Action Plan” consisting of ways to encourage the investigation of crimes against journalists as well as the protection and promotion of press freedom worldwide.

HURISA Holds Human Rights Camp in Ghana

The Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA) will hold its third annual “African Human Rights Camp” in Sogakofe, about 100 kilometers from Accra in Ghana, from October 19 to November 7.

The course offers an opportunity for participants from all over Africa to meet with each other and share valuable human rights experiences and strategies on ways in which to work together in future.

As in the past, there will be 30 places available for participants from all over Africa, with the host country, Ghana, being allocated the most places. HURISA has however decided that since human rights violation in Nigeria are still occurring, the “camp” would also accommodate more Nigerian representatives.

The three-week programme is being jointly organized by HURISA and “The Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre” in Ghana. The sessions are being planned to run from 8.30 am to 6.30 pm to maximize the three week period available.

HURISA is a non-governmental organization which offers professional services towards the promotion of a human rights culture and peace in South Africa and beyond its borders. It provides specialized databases as well as documentation, using appropriate technology for the collection and dissemination of information. It also aims to raise awareness of human rights issues through focuses research, the media and public events.
More Criticisms for Proposed Media Commission

The proposed creation of a National Mass Media Commission (NMMC) by the Federal Government under the 1995 draft Constitution to regulate the media during the Fourth Republic has continued to draw criticisms.

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), the Advertisers’ Association of Nigeria (ADVAN), the Association of Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria (AAPN), and the Outdoor Advertising Association of Nigeria (OAAN), joined last month opposition to the proposed regulatory body, asking the Government to abandon the idea.

The Commission, established by Section 154 of the draft Constitution, is given responsibility, among others, to coordinate, promote and regulate the existence of newspapers, magazines and publications generally as well as radio and television stations in the country; coordinate the activities of all professional bodies of the mass media; and deal with such other matters affecting the mass media, including code of conduct of mass media practitioners and ethical standards as the President may from time to time direct or the National Assembly may by an Act prescribe.

Speaking at a news conference in Abuja to mark the fifth anniversary of the NBC, its director-general, Dr. Tom Adaba, said: “A national, mass media commission is unworkable. There are different departments of the mass media and each should be under a supervisory body. We simply cannot lump them together under one regulatory body; it is just not possible.”

Observing that there were at present over five bodies, including the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), APCON, the Film and Video Censors Board, and the National Copyright Commission, to regulate different aspects of media practice, he argued that even “with the division, a lot of problems still exist. What will happen if we have one body to supervise the different bodies?”

Dr. Adaba suggested that instead of establishing the commission, the Nigerian Press Council should be strengthened so that it can effectively punish erring journalists.

Similarly, in a communiqué issued at the end of their executive retreat on “Advertising Policy and Strategic Planning” held in Ogere, Ogun State, advertising practitioners asked the Federal Government to reconsider the idea of establishing the media commission saying it was bound to have adverse consequences for the industry.

Urging that the “proposed NMMC’s constitutional provision which intends to restrict coverage areas for the media should be expunged”, the advertising practitioners said its retention ran “counter to the spirit of the role of advertising market and narrows the role of advertising media with serious economic consequences.”

Internet Access Planned for CHOGM Proceedings

As part of efforts to open up proceedings at the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to journalists and members of the public, an official NGO web site is being planned for the summit.

The initiative is that of OneWorld Online, a United Kingdom-based Internet supersite, in conjunction with Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxford) in the United Kingdom and Ireland; the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA); the Commonwealth Foundation and British Telecommunication (BT). They are putting together the official gateway site for the upcoming CHOGM for non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The summit of the Commonwealth Heads of Government is scheduled for between October 24 and 26, 1997 in Edinburgh, Scotland, and for the first time in its history, the conference is allowing a formal NGO presence. The theme of the conference is trade, development and investment.
As well as setting up the site, OneWorld Online will be attending the conference, publishing real-time text and audio news pieces and allowing the public, international government delegates and journalists access to the site, and to the OneWorld Online partnership web sites, through live terminals at the conference.

Part of the official NGO gateway site will be an area called “People to People” through which OneWorld Online hopes to get “grassroots issues” onto government agendas.

LESSONS FROM OTHER LANDS

Turkey: six Jailed Editors released under Amnesty Law

Six jailed editors last month were released from prison in Turkey last month under a new amnesty law which also brought freedom for award-winning newspaper editor, Ocak Isik Yurkcu.

Yurkcu, 52, former editor of the pro-Kurdish daily newspaper, Ozgur Gundem, was freed from prison on August 15, one day after Turkey’s parliament unanimously passed an amnesty law allowing the release of several jailed editors. He was sentenced in December 1994 to over 10 years in prison under sweeping provisions of Turkey’s Anti-Terror Law and Penal Code, which included disseminating separatist propaganda”. He was last year conferred with the 1996 International Press Freedom Committee to Project Journalists (CPJ).

The other editors who also regained their freedom last month are: Bulent Balta and Mehmet Fatih Yesilbag also of Ozgur Gundem; Mustafa Demirdag of the newspaper Ozgur Gelecek, Naile Tuncer of the leftist newspaper, Devrimci Proletarya; and Hatice Onaran of the leftist monthly Devrmci Cosum.

The new amnesty law, passed on August 14, grants three-year suspended sentences to editors convicted for a wide-range of articles that appeared in their newspapers, the majority of which concerned the Kurdish conflict.

Under Turkish law, editors are legally responsible for what appears in their papers. The amnesty provision requires that if a similar “offense” is committed within the three-year period, those amnestied must serve their full sentence in addition to any new sentence given by the courts.

Although the new amnesty law is expected to lead to the release of several editors, the CPJ said “even with the anticipated release of these editors, there will still be more journalists in prison in Turkey than in any other country worldwide.”

Sri Lanka: Government to Reform Media Laws

Sri Lanka is to amend existing media laws and introduce media freedom, according to a report by the Free Media Movement (FMM) which has mounted a three-year campaign for media reforms in the country.

The Sri Lanka Parliament has unanimously agreed to appoint a Parliamentary Select Committee to recommend broad changes to media laws and to introduce new legislation to improve media freedom.

Among the prospective duties of the Select Committee is the establishment of an independent broadcasting authority; the repeal of the restrictive Sri Lanka Press Council Law, and “the establishment of an independent broadcasting authority; the repeal of the restrictive Sri Lanka Press Council Law, and “the establishment of a media council to promote freedom of expression and the responsibility of both the print and electronic media, the right to information of citizens, and the maintenance of high standards of communications ethics.”

The proposal to appoint a Select Committee is the culmination of a three-year campaign by the FMM and other human rights organizations. A new media Minster was appointed after the move to establish a government-controlled broadcasting authority was struck down by the
Supreme Court in May (See June 1997 issue of Media Rights Monitor), subsequent to protests by the FMM and others.

The FMM commented that “While the appointment of the Select Committee is a welcome development, the FMM believes that media organizations and others interested in a free media policy in Sri Lanka will have to continue campaigning for such a policy, to ensure that the government will not use its majority in the Select Committee to introduce policies which may in fact threaten media freedom.”

PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS

UNESCO Calls for Nominations for Press Freedom Prize.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has called for nominations for the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize.

The award, named after the Colombian journalist, Guillermo Cano, who was murdered in Bogota, Colombia, in 1986 for exercising his profession, is intended “to honour, each year, a person, organization or institution that has made a notable contribution to the defence and/or promotion of press freedom anywhere in the world, especially if this involved risk.”

Last year’s winner was imprisoned Chinese journalist, Gao Yu, who was sent to jail for six years for allegedly “revealing state secrets.”


Nominations should be sent in French or English with the nomination form by October 31, 1997 to UNESCO at 7, place de fontenoy: 75700 Paris, France telephone: +33 1 45 68 42 12, fax: +33 1 45 68 55 84, e-mail: s.coudray@unesco.org.

MISA Calls for Nominations for 1997 Press Freedom Award

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) is inviting nominations from individuals and organizations for this year’s Press Freedom Award.

The Award will be presented at MISA’s annual Conference to be held in Zimbabwe from October 6 to 8, 1997. The theme of this year’s Conference is “Sustainability of the Independent Media in Southern Africa.”

Nominees should be Southern Africa media practitioners who have made significant contributions to media freedom in the region.

Last year’s award went to Allister Sparks of South Africa. Other winners were Zimbabweans Makani Kabweza in 1993 and Basildon Peta in 1994. The award carries with it a cash prize of US $1,000.

Nominations together with a detailed letter of motivation and nominee’s curriculum vitae should be sent to the Director at the MISA Head Office, Private Bag 13386, Windhoek, Namibia, Telephone: +264 61 232975, fax: +264 61 248016, e-mail: jeannette@ingrid.misa.org.na

Nigerian Journalists Win CCPJ Press Freedom Award

Nigerian journalists, Bayo Onanuga and Babafemi Ojudu, are among the winners of the first annual Press Freedom Awards of the Canadian Committee to Protect Journalists (CCPJ), according to a statement by the Organisation’s official, Kristina Stockwood, in Toronto, Canada.

The CCPJ honoured Canadian, Nigerian and Burmese journalists with its first annual Press Freedom Awards for their efforts to publish despite censorship or oppression.

The CCPJ is announcing two International Awards, Editor-in-Chief, Bayo Onanuga, and managing editor, Babafemi Ojudu, were honoured on behalf of the journalists of the
International Communication Network Limited (ICNL), publishers of The News, Tempo and PM News. They were honoured for continuing to publish their independent news magazines despite threats, harassment, detention, and imprisonment by the regime of General Sani Abacha.

The other International Award goes to Daw San San Nwe of Myanmar (formerly Burma), a thorn in the side of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) which has ruled the country since 1988 despite its defeat by Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 1990 election. San San New is serving a 10-year sentence for “distributing false news.”

Honourable mentions were given to four other nominees: the independent Belarusian radio station Radio 101.2, which was arbitrarily shut down in 1996 by the repressive regime of President Alexander Lukashenko; Frecuencia Latina, a Peruvian station which has been systematically threatened by the government, including the stripping of owner Baruch Ivcher’s citizenship; the CERIGUA news agency in Guatemala, which has endured years of civil war that saw it exiled in Mexico for many years; and El Espectador newspaper of Colombia, whose editor was among the many journalists murdered for their reporting in that country.

The recipient of the Canadian Award is Paul Kaihla for “murder Mysteries”, published in Maclean’s magazine in March 1997. His cover story exposed a cover-up of a drug smuggling investigation gone awry. The Canadian Award judges panel called it “a powerful and hard to obtain story that in both its pursuit and aftermath illustrated and defended the importance of freedom of the press.”

The recipient of the CCPJ Student Award is Judy Trinh, a graduate of the University of Western Ontario’s Graduate School of Journalism, for the video documentary “The Invisible Minority”.

Trinh overcame considerable obstacles to produce and broadcast a documentary on gay teen struggles in London, Ontario.

The awards will be presented at a fund-raising banquet to be held in March 1998 in Toronto.

Zambian and Ugandan Journalists Win Fellowships

Agnes Banda of the Times of Zambia has been awarded the Commonwealth Press Union (CPU) Fellowship in International Journalism, while Sara Sseggane of The Monitor newspaper in Uganda was awarded the Gordon Fisher Fellowship.

Banda, the senior features writer at the Times, will spend her fellowship in the Masters programme at City University in London, the United Kingdom for the 1997/98 academic year. She will also spend three weeks at a newspaper.

Sseggane, assistant editor of city and business news at The Monitor in Kampala, heads for the University of Toronto in Canada. She told the CPU News that the media in Uganda is “still grappling with how [to] effectively…perform its watchdog role.”

Guardian Photographer Wins Reuter Foundation Award

The Reuter Foundation has announced its awards for journalists for the academic year 1997/98.

A photojournalist with The Guardian newspaper in Lagos, Ray Onwumegbulem, is one of the numerous winners worldwide of this year’s award announced last month.

Among those who will be attending Oxford University in the United Kingdom under the award are Ruba Husari of Al Hyat in Palestine and the International Federation of Journalist’s (IFJ) Palestinian Media Monitoring Centre; and Pravit Rojanaphruk of The Nation in Thailand, a former winner of a fellowship from the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.
Others are Francine Alexander of the Caribbean Broadcasting Union in Trinidad; Chara Lata Joshi of India Today; Nafisa Shah of Newsline in Pakistan; Francisco Dondo of El Publicitario in Argentina; and Alexander Chege of The People in Kenya.

Journalists attending Stanford University in the United States are Jogadish Pokhrel of Nepal and Carlos Fernando Chamorro of “Esta Semana TV”, Channel 2 in Nicaragua. Those attending Bordeaux University in France are Mohamadou Mahmoun Faye of Le Soleil in Senegal; and Natasa Jokis of Politika in the former Yugoslavia.

Photojournalists heading to the University of Missouri-Columbia in the U.S. are Ray Onwuemegbulem of The Guardian in Nigeria; and Shivkumar Selvan of The Hindustan Times in India.

**Two Journalists Win South Africa Award for Courageous Journalism**

Thomas Kwenaithe, a journalist for the Sunday Times newspaper of South Africa, and Justin Arenstein, the editor of the African Eye News Service, jointly won on August 18 the 1997 South Africa Award for Courageous Journalism.

The Courageous Journalism award is sponsored by the Ruth First Memorial Trust and is administered by the Rhodes University Department of Journalism. The first winner of the award was a journalist and member of the South African Communist Party who was assassinated in Mozambique in 1982.

According to the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), “Kwenaithe was rewarded for his work in pursuing a major investigation into corruption in football, which led to a government Commission of Inquiry into the sport,” and the resignation of the head of the South African Football Association (SAFA).

The FXI said “Arenstein, whose news service is based in the Mpumalanga province, was honoured for his consistent coverage and disclosure of stories of major national interest,” including “investigations that uncovered serious incidents of corruption in the province.” The Freedom of Expression Defence Fund came to Arenstein’s defence earlier this year after he was the subject of allegations in the legislature. One of Arenstein’s stories this year led to a Commission of Inquiry into the issuing of false learners’ and drivers’ licences, including to the Deputy Speaker of Parliament and exposing corrupt civil servants.

**IAPA Awards Press Freedom Prize to Journalism Professor**

The Inter American Press Association (IAPA) has awarded its 1997 IAPA Grand Prize for Press Freedom to Professor Elie Abel, a journalism professor and former United States delegate to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The IAPA said Abel, a former Dean of the School of Journalism at Columbia University and former Chair of the Department of Communication at Stanford University, “distinguished himself for his defensive of press freedom in the face of UNESCO’s effort to establish a New World Order” in the past.

The award will be presented at the IAPA General Assembly on October 18 to 22 in Guadalajara, Mexico.

A number of other prizewinners were announced, including the IAPA-Harmodio Arias Award for distinguished reporting on Human Rights which was shared by Eduurdo Wilde and Csar Liquin of El Tribuna in Argentina for “their series of 182 articles that led to the solving of the murder of a forestry engineer by several police officers.” And by Renato Fagundes and Wilson Aquino of Jornal do Brasil for “their investigation of the deaths of civilians at the hands of the Rio de Janeiro state police.”
AI, USA inaugurates Media Spotlight Awards

Amnesty International, USA has announced its inaugural Media Spotlight Awards, to be presented at an awards benefit on September 23, 1997 in New York City, the United States.

Mike Wallace, Co-Editor of “60 Minutes” on CBS Television, is being honoured with a Lifetime Achievement award for his “career of ground-breaking investigative reporting, including his most recent work involving interviews with former State Department employee Richard Nuccio and activist Jennifer Harbury exposing CIA involvement in human rights abuses in Guatemala.

Other journalists being honoured with Amnesty’s Media Spotlight Awards include: Glenda Bailey, Editor-in-Chief of Marie Claire magazine, for exposing the human rights struggles women face worldwide; Bob Herbert, a columnist with The New York Times, who for more than 230 years has exposed injustice; reporter Tony Freemantle and photographers Dave Einsel and Richard Carson of The Houston Chronicle for their four-part series, “Crying for Justice”, documenting human rights violations and triumphs in South Africa, El Salvador, Rwanda and Guatemala.

Others are Producers Jonathan Demme and Ed Saxon, and Director Jo Menell for the documentary “Mandela”, Delano Lewis, President of National Public Radio, and Ruth Seymour, General Manager of KCRW-FM in Los Angeles, who initiated the monthly Urgent Action Programme at KCRW; and Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Rory O’Connor and Danny Schechter, for their weekly public television series, “Rights & Wrongs” which chronicles human rights issues worldwide and is a major contributor to human rights advocacy in the U.S.

Journalism Training Programmes

International Broadcasting Journalism Course

The Thomson Foundation in Cardiff, capital city of Wales in the United Kingdom, runs an annual 12-week Summer Course in news and current affairs broadcasting for experienced broadcasters.

The International Broadcasting Journalism Course is open to professionals who are keen to improve their skills and ready to share experiences with colleagues from around the world. It is ideally suited to broadcasters with about two years’ experience in television or radio. A maximum of 18 participants are selected for the programme.

The course is divided into two groups – television and radio – which work together at different times during the three months. The emphasis on news and current affairs broadcasting and participants study modern techniques and developments, and investigate the problems facing journalists through discussions with British experts and fellow professionals from other countries.

The course is run by broadcasters with vast experience of news, current affairs and documentary broadcasting, mostly with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Independent Television (ITV).

Participants learn to use one of the world’s most advanced editorial computer systems to write their stories and develop bulletins. Fundamental skills such as writing, interviewing and presentation are at the heart of the syllabus. The course is an intensive programme of lectures, discussions, demonstrations and exercises which call for active participation by all course members. It simulates realistic broadcasting activities, under close professional guidance.

The course includes practical training in and professional discussion of news compilation. Selection and writing; electronic newsrooms; critical assessment of programmes; presentation and interviewing; video and sound tape editing; writing to pictures; developing
ideas; team leadership; political and investigative journalism; sports reporting and editing; documentary techniques; lighting and camera formats; and ethics and values.

Participants prepare news bulletins and current affairs programme under realistic conditions. They have to find stories, write them, conduct and record interviews and actuality, edit tapes, write television scripts, work from agency tapes, build up bulletins, and shape and produce full programmes.

The course is based at the University of Wales College of Cardiff, which has radio and television studios, professionals sound and video recording and editing equipment, a computerized broadcasting editorial system, and a journalism library.

Although the course is based in Cardiff, participants are also expected to travel. They will be required to undertake major research projects and visit BBC and ITV stations for observation and for work experience. All participants will end the course by participating in the production of current affairs programmes.

Candidates applying for the programme should be over 24 years of age with a minimum of 18 months radio or TV journalism experience. Employers must support the application. Candidates must speak and read English with ease, even where they may normally work in another language.

Although return air fares to and from Britain are usually the responsibility of the candidate and his sponsors, assistance may be available to cover fees and air fares. Candidates or their employers can contact the British Council or the British High Commission for scholarship assistance even while waiting to be offered admission.

**Freedom Forum Media Studies Center**

The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, in New York in the United States holds several Technology Studies seminars yearly, exploring the theoretical and practical consequences of new information technologies.

The seminars examine the scholarly literature on technological change and, through the Center’s Technology Laboratory and site visits to major media facilities, allow participants to make hands-on connections with the technologies at issue.

The Center has two types of Technology Studies seminars; two week-long programmes each year serve journalism and mass communication educators, while three two-day programmes are held each year for newsroom managers from print, broadcast and cable operations as well as news services.

The Technology Studies Programme also involves research on state-of-the-art newsroom technology, with particular emphasis on the consequences of technological change on investigative reporting, satellite-based remote sensing for news gathering, the coming telecommunications infrastructure, and the transmission of information over switched networks such as the telephone system.

The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, established in March 1985 as the Garnett Center of Media Studies, is the foremost institute for the advanced study of mass communication and technological change in the United States.

The Center seeks to promote media professionalism, foster greater public understanding of how the media work, strengthen journalism practice and education, and examine the effects of mass communication and communication technology on society.

**Academy for Educational Development**

The Academy for Educational Development (AED) in Washington D.C. in the United States organises and conducts broadcast courses and workshops for radio and television journalists every year.

The programme is open to journalists from any country outside the U.S. and is part of a broad range of international educational and training services provided by the non-profit
The courses and workshops are financed by contract fees, largely from the U.S Government and United Nations agencies.
About 25 to 50 visiting journalists are admitted for the program each year.

Banking Fellowships for Journalists

About 10 banking fellowships are granted to journalists each year through the Herbert V. Prochnow Educational Foundation of the Graduate School of Banking at the University of Wisconsin located in Madison in the United States.

The programme which lasts for two weeks provides members of the business press with a better understanding of banking.

Applicants must have at least three years or professional experience in journalism and the fellowships cover facilities such as accommodation, materials, living expenses, tuition, and travel costs.

The selection of applicants for the fellowships is administered by the National Press Foundation in Madison.

We Must Never Forget “The Innocent Four”!

- 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.

*Media Rights Monitor,*
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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