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### **Film And Video Censorship In Nigeria**

**E**ven as the Nigerian film and Video industry strives to overcome the severe limitations wrought on it by inadequate financing, and poor technological infrastructure, it is confronted by a new problem—that of excessive censorship.

In recent years, the industry has witnessed a boom, making it a very important means of mass communication, although the primary objective of the films and videos being produced appears to be simply to provide entertainment.

But the potential of the industry for further development may be inhibited by the fact that it operates under an extremely restrictive legal framework which gives a government controlled body extensive powers to deny operators in the industry permission to distribute or exhibit films or videos.

Much of the powers are open to arbitrariness and may be exercised based only on the personal discretion of members of the regulatory agency as the law provides no objective criteria for assessment of film and video works.

The legal regime of censorship is enthroned by the National Film and Video Censors Board Decree No. 85 of 1993. The Decree established the National Film and Video Censors Board charged with the duty of:

- Licencing persons to exhibit films and video works as well as premises for the purpose of exhibiting films and video works.
- Censoring films and video works;
- Regulating and prescribing safety precautions to be observed in licenced premises;
- Regulating and controlling cinematographic exhibitions; and
- Performing such other functions as are necessary or expedient for the full discharge of all or any of the functions conferred on it by the decree.

Underlying the decree is a fixation by the government of what kind of films should be the production of such films by legislation.

For instance, the Decree prescribes that in reaching a decision on a film, the Films Censors Committee should consider whether such a film “has an educational or entertainment value, apart from promoting the Nigerian culture, unity and interest.”

It also requires that such a film should not “expose the people of African heritage to ridicule.”

Laudable as these objectives are, the manner of their inclusion in the Decree suggests that those who hold contrary views should not be allowed to produce films are produced, the Film Censors Committee should not approve them for exhibition or distribution.

But despite the existence of the Decree which gives the National Film and video Censors Board the responsibility for regulating the industry, the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, which is supposed, under the Decree, to have only one representative on the Board, virtually exercises the functions of the Board.

Zeb Ejiro, a renowned film producer and Vice President of the Association of film Producers of Nigeria, complained in an interview with Media Rights Monitor that “There are about seven or eight people on the Board. How they selected them, we don’t know, but I know that they all work for Ministry of Information.

The Ministry frequently undermines the authority and independence of the Board.

In December 1996, the then Minister of Information and Culture, Dr. Watler Ofonagoro, issued a 21-day ultimatum to home video marketers, dealers, exhibitors and producers to rid the sector of “porgraphic and violent” movies.

Following the minister’s ultimatum, the Board said it had sent out letters of authority to the police commissioners in all the prosecute marketers or dealers still in possession of such films.

The Chairman and members of the Film and Video Censors Board are supposed to be appointed by the President (head Of State) on the recommendation of its Secretary. It is however unclear what the actual practice is.

Besides the manner of appointment, the composition of the Board as stipulated in the Decree, is one that is unlikely to enhance its independence.

Section 3(1) of the Decree provides that the chairman of the Board “shall be an eminent Nigerian possessing sound knowledge of the Nigerian arts and culture and requisite experience in the film related industry or discipline.”

Other members are: a representative each of all the states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; a representative each of the Federal Ministries of Information and Culture, Education and Youth Development, Internal Affairs, and Nigerian Customs Service; a representative each of the Nigerian Police Force not below the rank of Superintendent of Police, the Federal Fire Service and the Nigerian Copyright Copyright Council.

The Board also has one person to represent each of the following interests – youth, women, Christian religion, Islamic religion and traditional religion; three other persons, one of whom shall be from any of the universities in rotation, with at least five years experience in the film related industry or discipline to be appointed on personal merit; and the Executive Director of the Board.

The lack of independence is compounded by the absence of security of tenure for Board members. Section 4(2) of the Decree gives the secretary to the Board, with the approval of the President a wide discretion to remove any Board member in a language which gives plenty of room for politically motivated dismissals.

The section provides that “The Secretary may with the approval of the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, at any time remove any member of the Board from office if the secretary is of the opinion that is not in the interest of the Board or the interest of the public for the member to continue in office and shall notify the member in writing to that effect”.

The Board’s spokesman, Mr. Ojeme Hastings, unwittingly attested to the Board’s lack of independence when he said in January last year that it had taken private initiatives to ensure that marketers, cinema halls, video clubs, video exhibition centers and other affected players in the sector comply with the minister’s directive to them to rid the sector of pornographic movies.

Film and video producers are also exposed to invasion of their privacy and therefore vulnerable to subtle pressures as the secretary to the Board is authorized under section 6(1)(d) of

the Decree to “keep a record of all necessary information of a film or video producer whose work is to be distributed or exhibited in Nigeria.”

The Decree lays down conditions under which an application for a licence to sue a premises for purposes of film or video exhibition may be granted.

One of such conditions is that the Board must be satisfied that “the applicant is a fit and proper person to be granted a licence-a subjective decision which may be used to disqualify perceived political opponents.

However, even where all the conditions have been satisfied, the Decree gives to the Board an unfettered discretion to refuse to grant a licence or at any time modify or to revoke the licence.

From the commencement date of the Decree, which is August 25, 1993, a person who exhibits or allows a film to be exhibited without a censorship certificate issued by the Board is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction of a fine of N5,000.00 or to imprisonment for one year.

For the purpose of effectively discharging its functions under decree, the board is required to divide the country into such number of zones as it may deem necessary and each of the zones shall have a Zonal Video Committee and a Zonal Video Censors Committee.

The committees are required to consider, in deciding whether to approve any film or video for exhibition, whether such a film or video has an educational or entertainment value, apart from promoting Nigerian culture, unity and interests.

The Committees must also be satisfied that such a film or video is not likely:

- To undermine national security;
- To induce or reinforce the corruption of private or public morality;
- To encourage or glorify the use of violence;
- To expose the people of African heritage to ridicule.
- To encourage racial, religious or ethnic discrimination; or
- By its content, to be blasphemous or obscene.

Section 37(2) of the Decree further stipulates that the committees shall not approve a film which in its opinion depicts any matter which is:

- Indecent, obscene, or likely to be injurious to morality.
- Likely to incite or encourage public disorder or crime; or
- Undesirable in the public interest.

The Decree gives the Committees an “absolute discretion” to approve a film or video works unconditionally or subject to such conditions as it may impose.

By section 40(1) of the decree, “the Film Censors Committee may at anytime order the withdrawal of a film from exhibition for the purpose of further censorship if it is satisfied that such withdrawal is necessary in the public interest.”

The Decree prescribes one of five categories of classification for every film or video approved by the Film Censors Committee or Video Censors Committee, namely general exhibition; intended particularly for children; not recommended for children; for mature audiences; and restricted exhibition.

The classification of the film is to be stated in a certificate.

However, an applicant who is aggrieved by a decision of the Film Censors Committee may appeal to the board.

But the Board enjoys considerable protection against judicial proceedings.

Firstly, Section 14(1) of the Decree provides that “Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any other law, no suit against the Board, a member or any employee of the Board...anyone in pursuance or execution of any enactment or law, or of any...authority, or in respect of an alleged negligence or default in the...such enactment or law, duty or authority, shall enactment or law, duty or authority, shall lie or be instituted...unless it is commenced within 12 months next after the act...complained or injury...months next after the ceasing thereof.”

The Decree goes on to give the Board further protection by stipulating that no suit shall be commenced against the Board before the expiration of a notice of one month of intention to commence the suit shall have been given to it by the intending plaintiff or his authorized agents.

The required notice must clearly state the cause of action, the particulars of the claim, the name and place of abode of the intending plaintiff, and the reliefs which he claims.

The Decree prohibits the issuance of any execution or attachment or such processes against the Board, thereby effectively barring the enforcement of any court judgment against the Board where it is unwilling to comply voluntarily.

Many major operators in the film and video industry themselves remain ignorant of the protected nature of film and video as means of expression, and therefore actively support excessive censorship.

Mr. Richard Mofe-Damijo, an actor and a film producer, who is also the managing director of white Water Limited, argues that the present regime of censorship is necessary if we are to prevent a backlash on the moral issue.

In his view, Nigeria does not have the infrastructure to stem the tide of the corruption and polluting influence that liberalism will have on the society if the country is to apply international standards of freedom of expression.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Nigeria subscribes to, provides protection for artistic expression when it says that “*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, this right includes freedom to hold opinion without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*” (Emphasis supplied).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Nigeria also ratified in 1993, is even more explicit in its protection of artistic expression.

Article 19(2) of the Covenant states 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 in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.*”

The European Court of Human Rights endorsed this view in its decision in *Muller & Others v. Switzerland*, Judgment of 24 May, 1988, Series A No. 139, para. 27 when it held, a reference to Article 19(2) of the ICCPR, that artistic expression is protected by the guarantees of freedom of expression and “*affords the opportunity to take part in the public exchange of cultural, political and social information and ideas of all kinds.*”

In a report on the same case, the European commission of Human Rights also noted that “*Through his creative work the artist expresses not only a personal vision of the world but also his view of the society in which he lives. To that extent, art not only helps to shape public opinion, but is also an expression of it and can confront the public with the major issues of the day...* (See Report of the European Commission of Human Rights, adopted on 8 October, 1986, para. 70).

Although there may be restrictions to this right, but these, in the words of the ICCPR, shall only be such as are necessary for the respect of the rights or reputations of others, and for the protection of national security or of public order, health or morals. (See Article 19(3) of the ICCPR).

These restrictions are subject to reasonably objective assessment and may not be arbitrary applied as the Human rights committee of the United Nations which monitors the implementation of the ICCPR, has repeatedly stated.

The question remains whether the range of reasons for which a film or video production may be censored under the Decree are covered by the international standards to which Nigeria has voluntarily subscribed.

Another issue is whether the unfettered discretion given to the Board under the Decree meets the requirements of these standards, especially with regard to the objective criteria to be used in imposing limitations on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

## **Censors Board Not Properly Constituted, says Zeb Ejiro**

*Renowned film producer and Vice President of the Association of Film Producers of Nigeria, Zeb Ejiro, spoke with Media Rights Monitor on the deficiencies in the existing framework for the regulation of film and video works in Nigeria. Following are excerpts from the interview:*

### ***How do you assess the regulation of films and videos in Nigeria?***

We have a Censorship Board. The duty of the Censorship Board is to vet your production to meet international standards in terms of quality and that you don't go contrary to the code and regulation of the censorship rules. In that Board, we are supposed to have a medical doctor, an Imam, a reverend father or a pastor, a lawyer and people like that, so that in every department, there will be somebody who will know something about what you are trying to talk about. But now, we don't have that kind of information. What we have are some ministry workers put together to censor our films. But I think they are doing a great job because it has to go through them before it is released to the market. It has to have a censorship certificate and it has to be written either it is given "G" general viewership, or it is "18", that is, people above 18 can watch, or "PG", parental guidance, so parents have to guide their children to watch.

### ***Do you know it this is legal body and if so what law governs it?***

Well, there is a decree. There is a censorship decree, I think, that governs that at the moment.

### ***This films categorization, is it this same board that decides?***

Yes, it is this same board that decides which category your film falls into – whether it is "18" or parental guidance (PG) or not for children (NC). It is this same board that will decide that.

### ***Are precluded from making particular films or you are at liberty to make any film at all?***

You are at liberty to make any film at all. But if you then say things contrary to the code – especially if you attack the government – they will stop it. Definitely.

### ***Have you experienced any of these?***

I haven't because I have not done any movie whereby I have to attack the government.

### ***Has any of your colleagues, to your knowledge, experienced this in the production of films?***

No. None at the moment. But they say it from time to time that these are the things you don't do. And then again, if it is too bloody, they will ask you to remove certain things. Then if it is sexually strong, they will ask you to edit certain things out.

### ***What aspects of these films – bloody, sex, etc. Which one of these is most frequently censored?***

Bloody and sexual films.

### ***What form does the censorship take? Do they just ask you to remove it or do they ask you to modify the film?***

They ask you to modify. I will give you an example. A film I did for somebody, "Closed Chapter", there was a graphic sexual scene. What I am saying is that it was suggested, highly, that the father made love to the daughter. We saw movement in the film and all that, but when we went to the censorship board, they said we should block all that, modify that, that let us just have a voice over an aerial shot of Lagos, and we had to do that. Without that, they will not have allowed the film to go into the market.

### ***So they didn't allow that film?***

They didn't allow it until we did that.

### ***Do they consider the cost of your doing all these?***

Well, from Day One, if you are a producer, there is what we call rules and regulations of the censorship board. So what you do is that you pick up that first of all. It tells you limits that you can go so that you don't have a problem of going back to the studio, because when you go back to the studio, you are going to incur more costs.

***Shouldn't this censorship actually start from the scripting level so that you can reduce your costs?***

No. Nobody can touch your script. It is not allowed for an outsider to touch our scripts, because in the process, it can be stole, and if it is stolen, somebody will go and produce it and you will find out at the end of the day that you are producing a similar story with somebody else. So, that is why you don't allow people to see your script. Even in Hollywood, when they give out scripts to actors, they don't give them full scripts, they give them sections of the script they are concerned with. Why they are doing this is because...for example, if 20th Century Fox is doing a movie, and Paramount picks that scripts, they can as well as do that same film and come to the market and fight them. That is why they don't give the full script. So you don't allow anybody see your script at all until you have finished production. It is during the censorship stage that you can now do corrections. It is done all over the place.

***As producers, are you not worried, collectively, that there is no Board, so to say, in place. It is just civil servants that are doing the job. Which one will be better for you?***

We are worried. We have been shouting because at times, the comments they make do not go down well because you probably want to see what kind of comment coming from a professional. For example, if there is a legal misinterpretation in the story, you expect a lawyer to be on the Board to say, well, this is not exactly how it is done. If fit is a medical...good example again is "Goodbye Tomorrow" a story I did on Aids. You know, before we sent it to the censorship board, we sent it to Aids Control – Nigeria Aids Control – in Federal Ministry of Health, where they previewed it and said certain medical terms that were used that were not proper.

***Were you required to send it or was it voluntary on your part that you sent it?***

Well, it is the right thing to do for any producer who is doing a story like that because in the beginning, during the scripting stage, in this case now, because it is Aids, so that you don't pass across wrong information, we worked together with Aids Control, they told us the kind of language to use. In that kind of situation, if you have a medical person in the Board, he will be able to tell from the people.

***If the doctor was on the Board, you don't have the need to go to the Ministry of Health?***

You see, for every story you do, especially when you are doing a story on Aids or sickle cell anaemia, for example, you have to do research as you are writing, first of all, you have to do proper research before you go into production. But after production, it is still proper for this same film proper for this same film to go through the censorship board so that the medical man in that board will be able to say everything is well interpreted. I will give you an example, in "Goodbye Tomorrow", when they were taking the actor's blood in the movie, the nurse was not wearing gloves. When they saw it, they said it is wrong. That has nothing to do with language. But it has to do with picture, ethics. So we had to go back and we had to re-shoot that scene. We gave the lady gloves to wear. So these are normal things. That is why you need to have these people on the board. Another example is what happened to Jide Kosoko. He did a film where something was said about he Islamic religion and when the thing came out, the Muslims attacked the film seriously. But the film was censored and passed through that board. So, if an Imam was on that board or a pastor or so, they would have been able to certify that aspect of the film.

***What is the desirability of censorship at all. Is it desirable to have censorship in film production?***

Yes. In this part of the world, I think so because if not, people will abuse it. There will be no control. In America, there is control. Even in America, they censor films. Films that you do not censor are the ones that go on big screen. On big screen, you are allowed to do whatever you want to do because you can select that audience. But if it is home video, even those films that you see on big screen, where they now reduce it to home video, they edit some scenes out. They do that. It is proper, but the Board has to, be properly constituted.

***What has your association been doing to ensure that a proper board is set up?***

We have been talking to people concerned, especially Demola James, who is the Head of the Board at the moment. Even though they call it a Board, it is not properly constituted. The right people are not there. You need seasoned producers in the Board – the likes of Peter Igho and co. or Ola Balogun, Eddie Ugboma. You need people like that in that Board who are experienced so that when they see a shot, they will be able to describe the kind of story you are trying to tell in that shot. These people are not there. So we have been talking to them, we have been talking to government.

***Has the Board ever been legally constituting in Nigeria before now?***

No. It has never been.

***So, for how long have you been fighting this battle?***

This industry took off properly about five year ago. We have been talking and discussing it since then. We got close when Ofonagoro was there, he gave us audience, we met him, we talked and he said he was going to do all these things and we were happy. But two, three months later, he was removed. So we have to start from the beginning.

***In the present Board, how many people are there?***

There are about seven or eight people on the Board. How they selected them, we don't know, but I know that they all work for Ministry of Information.

***Nigeria Should Not Apply International Standards to Films Censorship, Says Mofe-Damijo***

*Popular actor and film producer, Mr. Richard Mofe-Damijo, who is managing director of White Water Limited, spoke with Tive Denedo, on the state of the regulation of the video and film industry in Nigeria. Here are excerpts from the interview:*

***After the production of your film, are you expected to take it to the National Film and Video Censors Board before releasing it to the public?***

Yes. It is a statutory requirement.

***What provisions in the statute books require you to do that?***

I don't know the particular statute that is, but it is required that every film produced in Nigeria must go to the Censors Board for proper classification or grading as it were. And in my own case, I was given an 18 grading.

***What aspects of films or videos – sex, violence, religious or political commentary – are most frequently censored in Nigeria?***

Well, you can't have any long film that has only one of these elements that you have mentioned. It is usually a mix and it depends on the dexterity of the producer or the director to have something here and there to exploit in these films, but which unfortunately, is what the society wants. It is usually sex and violence that the society likes to watch. But I think that the Censors Board is more particular about sex and violence. There are not many of us who air strong political or religious commentary so I am not sure they have been challenged a great deal in that area.

***Do you know why they are particular about sex and violence?***

Oh yes. I think it is their way of protecting our sense of judgment and values and for a country where we are at the receiving end of whatever foreign technology brings, we have to be a lot more careful. We don't have the social structure to absorb the effects of the violent and sex movies. It is like saying that in the early days when Nigeria was just a courier country or a passage country that we shouldn't have a radical approach to drug and related issues because we are not a consumer nation. But we all know better now.

***Has any of your films run into trouble with the Censors Board whether it is the one you participated in or the one you produced?***

Not exactly. I won't say trouble. I thought when I was making "Out of Bounds", I thought I was going to get a grading of PG – that is Parental Guidance. But they gave me 18. I tried to put my case forward, but they me I was even better off at 18 so I left it at that.

***Using international standards of freedom of expression, do you think the Censors board is not doing a damage to the rights of Nigerians in the censorship of films and videos?***

No. I think we have to first of all identify where we are, where we live, who we are. Sometimes, when you use these so-called perverted international standards..., we have a different approach to life. We have a different cultural background from most of these other nations. We cannot afford to accept the global ways hook, line and sinker. No. It is responsible for the very confused state of most of our activities in this country, by trying to apply international standards as it were. When we want to apply international standards, we should be looking at education, technology, and all of that, not, you know, acceptance of violence and sex. We are not a more closed society. We still consider marital fidelity as sacrosanct and we don't deal with things like just smiling. We are still very serious. Are you saying, for instance, that we should accept international standards of expression and allow homosexuality in this country?

***How do you feel about the composition of the Censors Board. Is it effective against the background of a great deal of the things that outlawed, but are being allowed to pass through?***

I can assure you that the film you see, most of them don't go through the Censors Board. It is just unfortunate that we don't have a system in place where the policing of all the laws that have been made is effective and even when you go to the Censors Board and you get the kind of grading that you deserve, most people don't even bother to look at whatever grading we have. There are kids who have told me about my film and I always say to them, "hey you are not supposed to watch my film. Your mummy shouldn't have let you watch that film." This is just to tell you how much influence we are already beginning to suffer from. Things like rituals should not be watched by anybody under 18. But you find that because in Nigeria parents buy it and they don't separate it from the rest of the movies, children watch it.

***What would be your recommendation for a very effective Censors Board?***

I think that we have an effective Censors Board although I have not gone out to take a very critical look, but I think we have an effective Censors Board. What we need is a system whereby every law that is made, that sanctions that come with them or the penalties that go with them, should be pursued with the same vigour that we put into making law.

## **CPJ's Report Spotlights Abuses in Nigeria**

**T**he ruthless persecution of journalists in Nigeria was the single most troubling development in the media world in 1997, the New York-based Committee to protect Journalists (CPJ) said last month.

Releasing its worldwide survey of press freedom conditions in its annual report, "Attacks on the Press in 1997", the CPJ noted that "the most disturbing trend of 1997 was the brutal suppression of Nigeria's struggling independent media by General Sani Abacha who is now holding 17 journalists in prison.

The organization said Nigeria took the regional lead in Africa for imprisoned journalists with 17 as compared to the previous year's eight, "reflecting the escalating brutality of Gen. Sani Abacha's rule.

The report indicated that "at least 129 journalists were in prison in 24 countries at the end of 1997, and 26 journalists were murdered in the past year because of their profession.

The 443-page report, released at a 10am news conference on March 26 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. in the United States, includes detailed analyses of press freedom issues in 117 countries and six special reports.

It noted that Turkey released 40 journalists from prison during the year but was still holding at least 29 journalists in jail, more than any other country. Ethiopia was holding 16 journalists in prison at the end of 1997, breaking its public pledge to stop the suppression of independent media outside.

“We ask journalists everywhere to join CPJ’s campaign to free imprisoned journalists in Nigeria, Turkey, and other countries that criminalize independent reporting”, said CPJ board member Peter Arnett of the Cable Network News (CNN) at the March 26 Washington press conference. Arnett joined a CPJ mission in 1997 that led to the release of seven imprisoned Turkish newspaper editors.

At least 26 journalists were killed in 14 countries during the year, according to the report, including seven in India and four in Colombia. CPJ continues to investigate 10 other journalists’ deaths where a causal link to the victims’ work is suspected. A 10-year chart details the 474 murders of journalists by region and country.

In Mexico, where three journalists were murdered and scores more face criminal prosecution for reporting on crime and corruption, local journalists are banding together to defend themselves against legal persecution and violence.

In Hong Kong the handover of sovereignty to China has left journalists fearful of intimidation by Beijing and disturbed by self-censorship by publishers or local independent media outlets.

In Algeria, authorities continued efforts to quash independent reporting of the country’s bloody six-year civil conflict.

While no journalists were killed in Algeria in 1997, nearly 60 have been assassinated since May 1993, journalists there still live in constant fear for their lives. In Jordan, a kingdom that portrays itself as an emerging democracy, state restrictions on independent media left press freedom hanging in the balance.

CPJ documented 24 countries at year’s end where journalists are in prison.

There were 15 in jail in China, eight in Burma, seven in Kuwait, five each in Syria and Vietnam, and four in Peru.

In addition, CPJ listed another 30 cases of journalists whose imprisonment may also be due to their professional duties – 13 in Turkey, five in China, and four in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire).

“When journalists are murdered or brutalized”, CPJ Chairman Gene Roberts wrote in the book’s preface. “it is almost always by some government, some organization, some criminal cartel, some individual wanting to prevent the flow of embarrassing or incriminating information to the public. If the assassins learned that when they killed journalists the inevitable result was that they got more coverage, rather than less, the killings would subside.”

Compiled from the first-hand research of CPJ’s professional staff, “Attacks on the Press in 1997” is the single most authoritative, comprehensive, and up-to-date source of information on the status of press freedom around the world.

The book documents in compelling detail nearly 500 attacks carried out to silence journalists and news organizations through physical assault, imprisonment, censorship, and legal harassment.

It also describes CPJ’s action on behalf of hundreds of journalists through emergency response and fact-finding missions, personal appeals by CPJ board members and staff, grassroots efforts, diplomatic channels, and media campaigns.

“The ruthless persecution of local journalists in Nigeria was the single most troubling development over the past year”, said CPJ Executive Director William A. Orme, Jr.”

According to him, “Although Turkey still holds more journalists in jail than any other country, we are encouraged that the number is less than half what it was in 1996. We continue to urge the Turkish government to fulfill its pledge to repeal laws used to prosecute journalists.

Six special reports focused attention on areas CPJ views as leading indicators for press freedom worldwide.

These are:

**Turkey:** How a new government presented an opportunity for press freedom reform and the release of imprisoned journalists.

**Nigeria:** How CPJ's campaign to gain freedom for jailed editor Christine Anyanwu aids all imprisoned Nigerian journalists.

**Jordan:** How the government has sought to muzzle independent reporting of sensitive political issues such as the Jordan-Israel peace treaty.

**Mexico:** How Mexico's increasingly independent press boldly and bravely challenges the status quo.

**Hong Kong:** How the transfer of rule to China may threaten independent journalism in the former crown colony.

**Armenia and Azerbaijan:** How journalists in these hostile neighbouring republics cope with their Soviet-era legacy.

“Attacks on the Press in 1997” also provides detail on regional trends.

Under its survey of Africa, Nigeria took the regional lead for imprisoned journalists, with 17 as compared to last year's eight, reflecting in CPJ's view, the escalating brutality of Gen. Sani Abacha's rule.

## **UNESCO To Focus On Anyanwu On World Press Freedom Day**

**C**hris Anyanwu, the jailed editor-in-chief of the now defunct publication, *The Sunday Magazine (TSM)*, will be subject of international focus in May under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural Organisation (UNESCO) programme for this year's World Press Freedom Day.

Anyanwu is one of four journalists worldwide selected by UNESCO to be the focus of this year's celebration. A video report is being produced on her to be distributed by satellite to broadcasters worldwide on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on May 3.

She will also be formally awarded on that day the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

The UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France, has commissioned a London-based company, WTN Productions, to produce the video report which will include interviews with Anyanwu's former colleagues and family members. WTN producer, Ian Hazleton, told Media Rights Agenda that the object of the video report is to “alert public and political opinion to be continually vigilant on the issue of press freedom” adding that “we believe her (Anyanwu's) case is of special interest to international opinion.

Anyanwu was convicted in July 1995 of charges of accessory after the fact to treason, along with three other journalists, by a special military tribunal after grossly unfair secret trials following stories and articles published by their news magazines about an alleged coup plot which the Federal Military Government claimed it uncovered in March 1995.

The other journalists are Kunle Ajibade of *TheNews* magazine; George Mbah of *Tell* magazine, and Ben Charles Obi of *Weekend Classique* magazine. Each of them is serving a 15-year jail term.

On February 16, this year, UNESCO awarded the 1998 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize to Anyanwu. She is the second journalist to be awarded the prize and will be formally presented, apparently in absentia, with the award, which carries a \$25,000.00 prize money and a sculpture by Edgar Negret, on May 3.

She was nominated for the award by the World Press Freedom Committee, based in the United States, and the Paris-based free expression organization. Reporters sans Frontiers (RSF).

Created in 1997, the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Prize is given to honour “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 involves risk”. The prize is named

after Guillermo Cano, the crusading Columbian journalist and editor who was murdered in Bogota, Colombia, in 1986 for practicing his profession – journalism.

The first ever winner of the award is the imprisoned Chinese journalist, Gao Yu, who is currently serving a six year jail term in china for allegedly “revealing state secrets.”

Gao Yu was jailed in 1994 for her authoritative report about Chinese economic and political affairs published in the Mirror Monthly, a Hong Kong magazine. She was awarded the prize last year.

The similarities between Gao Yu’s circumstances and Anyanwu’s are striking and the award of the prize to Anyanwu is bound to be controversial as it was when it was awarded to Gao Yu.

China threatened to close-UNESCO’s China office and withdraw from the organization upon the award of the prize to Gao Yu, and in a protest letter, accused UNESCO of interfering in China’s internal affairs by the award.

It asked UNESCO to take “prompt measures” to correct the error and rescind the award. (See text of China’s letter on Page 5).

But UNESCO’s Director-General, Federico Mayor, declined saying the panel of 17 journalists who constituted the jury that made the selection “was totally independent, as were its deliberations and the vote taken” adding that “You will, I am sure, agree with me that it would be most inappropriate for UNESCO to seek to influence the jury’s choice in any way”.

Anyanwu has received tremendous international attention and won several awards since she was jailed in 1995.

In 1996, she won, along with Ajibade, Mbah and Obi, the Hellman/Hammett grant which is administered by Human Rights Watch and given annually to writers around the world who, as a result of expressing their views or because of their political associations, are persecuted and are in financial need.

The grant programme began in 1989 after the trustees of the estates of writers Lilian Hellman and Dashiell Hammett asked Human Rights Watch to assist such writers. The four imprisoned Nigerian journalists shared a prize of \$10,000.00.

Anyanwu has also won the “Courage in Journalism” Award which is given annually by the U.S. based International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) to women journalists who have demonstrated “extraordinary qualities in pursuing their craft under difficult and often dangerous circumstances” and who have risked their lives in the practice of journalism.

Last year, she was one of the six recipients of the International Press Freedom Awards of the Committee to Protect journalists (CPJ).

CPJ’s Executive Director William Orme, said While announcing the awards, that “The journalists receiving International Press Freedom Awards risk personal and political peril in upholding the highest standards of their profession” adding that “their determination to provide independent news coverage in these most difficult circumstances advances the cause of press freedom for journalists everywhere.

Orme told those gathered at the ceremony that the award and petitions were the beginning of CPJ’s campaign to secure Anyanwu’s release and that the petitions would be delivered by CPJ officials to the 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.”

*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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## **Newsletter Letter**

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## **EDITORIAL COMMENT**

**T**he recent explosion of the motion-picture industry in Nigeria has made the media of film and video very important means of mass communication.

But in imposing censorship measures, there is a tendency to treat the film and video industry as pure business, carried out for the purpose of making profit only and, therefore, undeserving of the privileges and freedom enjoyed by other modes of mass communication.

This approach, in our view, is erroneous. As means of artistic expression, the media of film and video benefit without question from the guarantees of freedom of expression provided by international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Nigeria subscribes to.

Although current censorship efforts are apparently not motivated by political considerations, the possibility is latent.

As the media develop their potential as avenues for political expression, they are bound to suffer increasingly from the censor's knife.

Regrettably, many of the major operators in the video and film industry are oblivious of the dangers that lie ahead.

Fired by an obsessive pre-occupation with morality, they have adopted a narrow view of the issue, giving active support to video and film censorship, to the detriment of the rights of the viewing public.

In this issue, we examine the legal framework for the regulation of the industry in the hope that some public debate might lead to more thought being put into the National Film and Video Censor Decree No. 85 of 1993, which was made without consultations with stake-holders and about which many are ignorant.

Ahead of World Press Freedom Day on May 3, we also focus on some activities surrounding the event.

*Austin Agbansuremi*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Media Rights Agenda (MRA) would like to acknowledge the support of various individuals and organisations in the production of this newsletter, and in particular, the **European Human Rights Foundation** which provided the grant for the publication.

## LETTERS

### Kudos to Your Efforts

**I**f your December edition (of the *Media Rights Monitor*) can be said to be in-depth, well-researched and challenging, then your January edition is nothing but scintillating, educating, sizzling and...it is too great.

Please keep on the good work. You are just on course.

**Wole Afolabi**

Sub-Editors Desk

*The Guardian*

Rutam House

Isolo, Lagos

### God's Blessings

**C**ongratulations on your monthly newsletter, Media Right Monitor.

I pray that God will give you the ability to continue to improve on the standard of the magazine.

I look forward to my own copy of the next edition of the magazine.

**Oloruntola Sunday**

Features Department

*Daily Times*

Lateef Jakande Street

Agidingbi, Ikeja, Lagos

### Your Efforts Have Positive Influences

**I** read *the Media rights Monitor* with great interest. And I admire your courage and professionalism in accepting this responsibility and performing so outstandingly.

I feel certain that your efforts have positive influences even under very difficult circumstances.

Please keep the Monitor coming to me. I use it constructively in several ways.

With this go my best wishes and warmest regards, for you and your work.

**Leonard R. Sussman**

Senior Scholar in Int'l Communications

Freedom House

120 Wall Street, 26th Floor

New York, N.Y. 10010

U.S.A.

### Persecuted Writers, Artistes to Attend Culture Ministers Meeting

**W**riters, artists and musicians who have been banned, beaten and imprisoned are planning to use a meeting of the world's culture ministers to emphasize that cultural development is impossible without freedom of expression.

The ministers were scheduled to meet in Stockholm, Sweden from March 30 to April 2 at the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development.

Among more than 15 personalities who will participate in the “No Freedom...No Culture” conference is a Chinese “delegation” of renowned exiled dissident writers – Wei Jingsheng, Lui Binyan and Yang Lian.

Mr. Wei, China’s best-known dissident who was released from jail and exiled last November, is to receive the Olof Palme Prize, awarded while he was in jail in 1994.

It will be presented at the start of the March 30 conference by Lisbet Palme, the widow of the slain Swedish Prime Minister.

The Chinese participants will be joined by a veritable United Nations of creative personalities who share the common experience of suffering censorship, imprisonment and exile because of their art and their promotion of free expression.

Paris-based World Association of Newspapers, and based Index on Censorship in London, is giving them the opportunity to speak in the same conference center where some of the governments that tried to silence them are expected to participate in the Conference sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Swedish Government.

“We believe it is important to remind all governments that culture can only thrive if artists and writers are free to express themselves, and we are grateful to UNESCO and the Swedish Government for giving us this opportunity,” said Timothy Balding, Director General of the Paris-based WAN.

“No Freedom...No Culture”, part of WAN’s 50th anniversary celebrations, brings together personalities from journalism, music and the arts to examine the relationship between the struggles for freedom of expression, and to discuss the most effective forms of artistic resistance to repression.

Among the other scheduled participants are Algerian journalist Salima Ghezali, whose newspaper was suspended at least nine times before being shut down; Kenyan writer wahome Wa Mutahi, whose use of humour to soften his biting commentary failed to keep him out of jail; and award-swinging Croatian editor Victor Ivancic, the bete noire of President Franco Tudjman.

Another Algerian journalist, Omar Belhouchet, and Iranian writer, Abbas Mourafi, are also among the personalities to join the conference.

Belhouchet, recently sentenced to an year in prison by the Algerian authorities, is the founder and editor-in-chief of the influential French language Algerian daily el Watan.

Mourafi, one of the leading lights of the “new generation” of Iranian authors who began writing and publishing during the Islamic Revolution, is founder of the cultural magazine, Gardun. Mr. Mourafi was sentenced to six months in prison and 20 lashes in 1996 and the magazine was suspended.

WAN, the global association of the newspaper industry, groups more than 15,000 newspapers in over 90 countries. Index on Censorship, a publication of the Writers & Scholars Trust, is a bi-monthly magazine which publishes the works of banned writers as well as information and analysis on various censorship issues. (IFEX)

## **Handbook On Communications Technology Released**

**T**he second edition of “At Ease With E-mail: A Handbook On Using Electronic Mail for NGOs In Developing Countries” has been released by the Friedrich Ebert foundation and the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service.

Like the original, the revised 1998 edition introduces key elements in the ever-changing field of communication technology.

It explains “basic terms and concepts, offers advice and communications networks and local e-mail service providers and suggests ways to benefit from these communication tools”.

The second edition examines and explains the World Wide Web and provides contact information on organizations in the developing world which promote or support computer networking. There is also a new section detailing further print and Internet resources.

Further information about the handbook can be obtained at the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service, e-mail: [ngls@undp.org](mailto:ngls@undp.org) or [ngls@unctad.org](mailto:ngls@unctad.org); or the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, e-mail: [fesny@undp.org](mailto:fesny@undp.org) or [fesny@igc.apc.org](mailto:fesny@igc.apc.org). (IFEX).

## **China Protests Press Freedom Award To Its National**

*Following is the text of a letter by China's Ambassador to UNESCO, Zhang Chongli, in 1997 protesting the selection of jailed Chinese journalist, Gao Yu, as winner of the first ever UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize:*

**B**oth shocked and distressed to have learned that you are supposed to present the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize to Gao Yu, I am authorized to make the following statement.

Firstly, the truth of the case of Gao Yu was already made amply clear to UNESCO and yourself by Ambassador Yu, my predecessor, two years ago. She had worked in the profession of journalism but, due to her criminal act incompatible with her professional status, she was sentenced in 1994 to a six-year term of imprisonment in accordance with Chinese law. S, Gao Yu is no longer a journalist but a criminal. The case of Gao Yu is, beyond any doubt, purely a domestic judicial matter, not constituting in any sense an issue of press freedom. It is a matter entirely within jurisdiction of a sovereign state, not to be interfered by any external forces.

UNESCO is a UN agency of intergovernmental nature. One of the fundamental principles guiding all its actions is clearly stipulated in its Constitution, namely, I quote, "the Organisation is prohibited from intervening in matters which are essentially within their domestic jurisdiction..." This gross interference in our internal affairs perpetrated by UNESCO is assuredly unacceptable to china, but will, most regrettably, only damage the relationship between China and UNESCO.

UNESCO should take prompt measures to correct this error and rescind the plan to go ahead with the awarding of the prize. At present, a small number of people in certain countries are doing their utmost to vilify China on the human right issue and its social system. This is extremely unpopular, opposed not only by China but also by peoples the world over. It is my sincere hope that UNESCO should be able to distinguish right and wrong and refrain from joining the ranks of these people hostile to China.

Cherishing most dearly and persistently the long-existing relations between China and UNESCO.

I remain.

Cordially yours,

**Zhang Chongli**

**Ambassador, Permanent Delegates**

## **Gao Yu Thanks UNESCO For Press Freedom Prize**

**F**ollowing is the text of Chinese journalist Gao Yu's letter to UNESCO from prison upon learning that she had been awarded the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize in 1997.

**I** learned from relatives that I was being awarded UNESCO's first World Press Freedom Prize. This exciting piece of news was all we talked about during my monthly thirty-minute meeting with them.

I am a Chinese journalist. This award is a requital and I dedicate it to my country. I feel tremendously proud. I ardently love the journalistic undertaking that I am devoted to.

First of all, I want to thank my parents. They were the ones who gave me life, my character and morals. They taught me to be true, courageous, clear about what to love and want to hate, and to be upright and outspoken. These are the primary things I possess and the foundations of my journalistic career.

Secondly, I would like to thank all Chinese intellectuals, over the past hundred years, for their dedication to a prosperous and strong China, and their fundamental contribution to the impetus of China. It is this thought as well as this dynamic that inculcates and encourages me. The wisdom and talent of Chinese intellectuals are the unlimited source of inspiration that I draw upon in my journalistic work.

Lastly, I have to thank the international press, fellow colleagues in Hong Kong and those around the world, for your continuous support and concerns in the past few years. This is the chief source of strength and encouragement that I receive behind bars. Of course, this also goes for my many friends in China and relatives who have extended their concerns and love to me. I would like to quote a Pablo Neruda poem: “deny me bread, And air, deny me light, and spring, But never your laugh, for I should surely die.” I think I have found Neruda’s laugh from this far away international conference hall. My dear friends, when I receive this honour I just feel I am being given too much, yet I am offering too little to the world, to China and to journalism. But when I leave my prison bars, regaining my freedom and living under the sun, I will use my pen to repay the world and my homeland. The pen is the most precious thing I own in my life. Although I am being deprived of it, I still keep this heart of mine forever full of enthusiasm.

Thank you.

Thank you my friends.

From your sincere Gao Yu.

## **Human Rights Institute Holds Teaching Session In July**

**T**he International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, will hold its 29th Teaching Session in Strasbourg from July 6 to 31.

The Specialized annual study session in human rights is directed at advanced students in law, political science, human and social sciences, professional and researchers, members of the legal professions and any other profession related to human rights, national and international civil servants as well as members of non-governmental organizations.

Its purpose is to provide advanced courses in international and comparative human rights law which will be taught by specialists in the field.

In addition to the fundamental courses devoted to the major human rights protection systems and to international humanitarian law which are presented simultaneously in English, Spanish, French and Arabic, the session includes introductory and thematic conferences, given either in French or in English.

The topic to be covered by this year’s conference is “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – 50 Years Later: Acquisitions and Potentialities for the XXIst Century.”

Parallel to the 29th Study Session, the 26th Session of the International Centre for University Human Rights Teaching (CiedhU) will also be held.

The programme is designed for professors and researchers in the field of human rights.

Admission to the Centre is dependent upon the nomination of candidates by the Dean or Director of the establishment where they are teaching or doing research.

According to the Institute’s Secretary, Jean-Bernard Marie, the annual study session unites an average of 400 participants coming from more than 100 countries.

Approximately 70 professors and researchers take part in the CiedhU programme.

## **UNESCO Publishes World Communication Report**

**T**he United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) has published a new book entitled: “World Communication Report”.

Written by Dr. Lofti Mahezi the report is a “comprehensive account of the communication scene – media, technology and economic and development issues...”, according to UNESCO’s Director-General, Federico Mayor, in the book’s introduction.

The implication of emerging technologies such as the Internet, satellite broadcasting and digital transmission are explored.

Also explored in the report are issues like the significance of increasing media concentration by organizations such as Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, Time Warner (parent company of the Cable News Network, CNN), Rede Globo in Brazil and Television in Mexico.

The Report also examines the role that the future of the new democracies will depend in part on the development and strengthening of free independent and pluralistic media in both the public and private sectors, since the spread of knowledge and values is impossible without freedom of communication.”

In addition, there are sections dealing with violence and the media; with regulatory, legislative and copyright issues; with the ramifications of globalization; with the role of women in the media, including how women are portrayed and their career opportunities; and on the current development imbalances between and within countries.

Currently available in English (ISBN: 92-3-103428-6) and French (ISBN: 92-3-203428-X), a Spanish version will be issued later this year.

Copies can be ordered from Bernan Associates at +800274 4888 or by contacting UNESCO Publishing in Paris, Fax: +331 45 68 57 37 (IFEX).

## **Freedom House Publishes 1998 Press Freedom Map**

**N**ew York-based human rights organization, Freedom House, has announced the publication of its 1998 annual Map of Press Freedom in the world.

The Map draws on the latest assessments of the organisation’s annual Survey of Press Freedom Worldwide.

The survey, nearing its 20th year, examines the level of freedom in the print and broadcast news media in 186 countries.

Press freedom ratings are based on a series of questions in each of four categories: the legal restrictions on news media, the degree of independence of media from the interests of government or other political players, economic factors which influence news content, and the frequency and severity of actual cases of press freedom violation.

Nigeria moved from the partly free category in 1995 to one of the darkest spots on the global map and has remained there ever since.

Freedom House’s 20-page rating of press freedom, country by country, will be available upon request from May 3, 1998- World Press Freedom Day.

The publication includes an analysis of how media restrictions are affecting the developing Asian financial crisis. The essay is titled “Global Warning: press Controls Fuel the Asian Debacle”

The publication of the Map was done with the assistance of the World Press freedom Committee.

## **ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS IN MARCH 1998**

### **Journalists Assaulted, Detained At Pro-Democracy Rally**

**H**eavily armed anti-riot policemen smashed news cameras, assaulted several journalists and briefly detained them on March 3 while the journalists were covering a pro-democracy rally in Lagos which the security agents sought to forcefully prevent.

The rally, organized by the United Action for Democracy (UAD), a coalition of 26 human rights and pro-democracy organizations in Nigeria, was intended to counter another one being held in Abuja on the same day by organizations asking the Head of State, General Sani Abacha, to remain in power after October 1, 1998 as a civilian president.

The UAD rally was scheduled for 3.00pm. at the Yaba Bus Stop in Lagos. But as early as 6.00am., anti-riot policemen had taken over the Yaba bus stop area.

At about 11.00am., when journalists began arriving at the venue of the proposed rally to monitor preparations, the policemen deployed by the government to prevent the rally, chased and attacked them, arresting at least 15 journalists and assaulting several in the process.

Among those arrested were the Political Editor of This Day newspaper, Yusuph Olaniyonu; and two of his colleagues in the newspaper, Robert Kajo and Cchukwudi Nwabuko; as well as the entire crew of the African Independent Television (AIT), including Yewande Oluchi.

Others arrested include Mustapha Isa; a reporter with the Post Express newspaper, Bassey Udo; Sunday Ode of the New Nigerian newspaper; Emmanuel Ogunyale, a photographer with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN).

The policemen who arrested the journalists, led by Mr. S.D. Akinyemi, an assistant superintendent of police (ASP), took them to the Ojuelegba Police Station in Surulere, Lagos escorted by members of the Lagos State anti-robbery squad, Operation Sweep. They took the journalists into a police jeep with registration number PR 5757 LA while the AIT crew were taken in their Peugeot 504 Station wagon car.

The journalists were detained for about one hour until they were released on the orders of a Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP), Mr. P.I. Leha, commander of Area "C" of the Lagos State Police Command, who apologized for the embarrassment, but warned them not to support the demonstrators.

Monday Emoni, the photo editor of *TheNews* magazine was beaten up and his camera smashed. The policemen also seized a television camera belonging to Degue Broadcasting Network (DBN) Television. But other journalists present protested until the camera was released.

Kola Oshiyemi said although he ran away when the policemen began chasing journalists, five policemen overtook him and pounced on him. They beat him up and tore his clothes.

According to him, "they ordered me to sit down at the bus stop and threatened to drag me to their boss."

Oshiyemi said he was later ordered, along with a number of other people arrested, to leave the venue "with immediate effect."

### **FRCN News Manager Removed For Airing Interview With M.D. Yusufu**

**T**he Head of the News Department of the National Station of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Mr. Adelarin Oyetunde, was removed and redeployed to the Corporate Affairs Department of the station last month for airing an interview with a presidential aspirant, Alhaji Mohammed dikko Yusufu.

The interview, conducted by Chika Emerenwa, was aired in the middle of last month by Lagos station of the Federal Government owned radio station.

Shortly after the interview, Oyetunde was reportedly queried over why he permitted the interview to be aired on the station.

He was later removed and redeployed through a letter issued by the station's headquarters in Abuja and signed by the Director of News and Programme, Mr. Tajudeen Akanbi. He was replaced by Wole Abioye.

Yusufu, a former Inspector-General of Police, declared his intention to vie for the presidency under the present transition to civil rule programme in the face of widespread reports

of the ambition of the Head of State, General Sani Abacha, to succeed himself by transforming into a civilian president at the end of the transition programme.

Although politicians roundly disclaimed their interest in the presidency for fear of offending General Abacha, Yusufu was initially the only person to publicly proclaim his interest in the highest office under the platform of the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM).

He was later joined by Dr. Tunji Braithwaite.

He has frequently maintained that he would defeat General Abacha in the August presidential election and has consistently criticized those campaigning for him to succeed himself.

Reports said another report, a paid commercial programme, to feature a profile of Yusufu, which was also being packaged by two other workers at the Lagos station, Priscilla Adesaren and George Chukwu, to be aired on the station, was stopped by its management, apparently on instructions from Abuja.

The two broadcast journalists were asked to discontinue the programme.

The officer in charge of the Lagos National Station, Mr. Atilade Atoyebi, was also reportedly directed to ensure that any news report or programme concerning Yusufu should no longer be aired on the station.

### ***Vanguard* Reporter Arrested With Nine Others**

**T**he Labour Correspondent of the *Vanguard* newspaper, Joe Ajaero, was arrested by security agents at about 2.00am. on March 12 in his room at the Satellite Hotel in Ilorin, Kwara State, where he was attending a two-day seminar on the review of labour laws.

They are the President of the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, Mr. Femi Falana; Dele Peters of the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies; veteran labour activists, Emmanuel Nwadiakor and William Omonua; and the General Secretary of the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives, Moses Ahuma Matu.

According to Ajaero, "The previous night, I had gone to bed ill and drowsy after taking my drugs. The security agents banged my door for about 15 minutes. When they realized I would not open, they forced the door open. As soon as they broke the door, I got out of my bed. The stoutly build men approached me shouting 'shoot him, kill him'. They pointed guns at me simultaneously, they kicked and beat me."

Despite repeated enquiries, Ajaero was not told the reason for the invasion of his hotel room.

He was bundled out of the room and taken to join the others. They were later taken to the office of the State Security Service (SSS) at Ilorin.

At the office where they were all interrogated, when Ajaero identified himself, he was told by the security agents that "we have been looking for you since November."

Ajaero said they were told that "whenever you are invited to any workshop, you have to look at the political undertone of such an invitation because the country is pregnant at least for the next six months. Nigeria is sitting on a keg of gun power and might explode anytime."

They were fed with half-boiled beans and were not given any cutlery to eat with.

The detainees were later moved from the SSS office to the State Police Command for another round of interrogation which lasted until midnight.

The 10 detainees, including a woman, were then put in a single room.

The next morning, Ajaero was taken along with other detainees back to the hotel where they retrieved their belongings before being moved back to the State Criminal Investigation Department.

On March 17, five days after their arrest, the 10 detainees were taken before a magistrate court in Ilorin and charged with unlawful assembly.

The court however granted them bail and they regained their freedom later that day.

### **Punch Reporter Alleges Threat To His Life**

**T**he Political Correspondent of *The Punch* newspaper, Akanimo Samson, alleged last month that he received a death threat from a national officer of one of five registered political parties for his alleged hostile attitude towards the party.

Samson alleged that the politician threatened to “eliminate” him and that an “elimination order” was issued against him during one of the weekly political briefing sessions of the party at the politician’s residence.

He claimed that he was labeled an enemy of the party who should be handled “appropriately.”

Samson said he was afraid of the implications of handling a perceived enemy appropriately adding that he suspected that his life was in danger.

His suspicion, he said, was further heightened by a previous experience he had sometimes last year in the hands of persons he suspected to be agents of the politician.

According to him, thugs hired by the party had on that occasion assaulted him and two other journalists – Esther Oye, a political correspondent with *The Diet* newspaper, and Kunle Oderemi, another political correspondent with the *Daily Champion* newspaper, at the party’s secretariat in the outskirts of Lagos.

Samson has petitioned the Inspector-General of Police, Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie, seeking protection for his life.

There has been no response from the police.

### **FRCN Directs Stations To Black Out Clinton’s African Tour**

**T**he Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) last month directed all its stations nationwide to black out any report related to the visit of the United States President, Mr. Bill Clinton, to Africa.

President Clinton began a 12-day six month tour of Africa on March 23 during which he visited Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, Botswana, South Africa and Senegal while Nigeria was left out of his itinerary.

FRCN’s Director of News and Programmes, Mr. Tajudeen Akanbi, reportedly issued a circular asking all stations to blackout news of the American President’s visit.

A similar directive is also believed to have been issued to the Voice of Nigeria (VON), which is the external broadcasting arm of the Federal Government.

The directives are believed to have been motivated by the fact that Nigeria was shunned by the U.S. President in the countries to be visited while various United states government officials and diplomats in Nigeria have frequently criticized the appealing human rights situation in Nigeria.

### **Rising Sun Newspaper Publisher Arrested**

**T**he publisher of the *Rising Sun* Joshua Ogbonna was arrested by security agents in Lagos on March 9 for undisclosed reason.

According to a statement by Premier House Communications Limited, the publishing company of the newspaper, Ogbonna was arrested at about 2:00pm at the Apapa, Lagos office of the newspaper.

David Maduako, a journalist with the newspaper who issued the statement, said Ogbonna was arrested by two policemen from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) at Alagbon Close in Ikoyi, Lagos, who gave their names as Inspector S. Popoola and Inspector U. P. Abah.

The policemen did not give any reason for Ogbonna’s arrest, although they said they were sent to pick him up by a deputy superintendent of police.

The arrest, however, is believed to have been over a series of articles and stories published by the newspaper about chief M.O. Kanu, an Abuja-based hotelier and father of

Daniel Kanu who is Chairman of the pro-Abacha organization, Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA), which is campaigning for the Head of State, General Sani Abacha, to transform into a civilian president after October 1, 1998.

The articles touched on Kanu's activities and lifestyle.

Maduako claimed that the newspaper has been having a running battle with Chief Kanu whom, he alleged, had previously used security agents to harass Ogbonna.

### **Imo Police Arrest Two Journalists**

**T**he Imo State correspondent of the *National Concord* newspaper, Chidi Nkwopara, and a reporter with the Statesman newspaper Douglas Njoku, were arrested by the police in Imo state on March 26 and detailed without charge or trial.

The arrest followed their visit to the Akri Oil Flow Station of the Agip Oil Company to investigate reports of an Oil blow out at its location in Oguta, Imo State.

The blow-out reportedly took place on March 6 ravaging over a thousand hectares of farmland and destroying cash crops worth millions of naira.

The two journalists who are detained at the Oguta Police Station were accused of espionage by the Oil company.

Before they were moved to the police station, they were detained in the open under the scorching midday sun for over five hours.

They remained in detention at the month's end.

### **SSS Agents Arrest Newspaper Publisher, Editor**

**T**he publisher and editor-in-chief of the *Prime Sunset*, newspaper Mr. John A. Edward, and the assistant editor, Ganiyu Adeoye, were arrested in Lagos on March 22 by State Security Service (SSS) agents for undisclosed reasons.

They were arrested at about 1.00pm. at the premises of a commercial printer, Satellite Press, in the outskirts of Ikeja, the Lagos State capital, where they were seeing to the printing of that day's edition of the newspaper. The Prime Sunset is an evening newspaper.

The printing of the newspaper was in progress when the security agents suddenly stormed the premises and arrested the two men who were later taken to an unknown place.

They remained in custody without charge or trial at the month's end.

### **Radio Rivers GM Sacked Over Political Report**

**T**he Rivers State Government last month sacked Mr. Morgan Omodu, the General Manager of state-owned radio station, Radio Rivers, over a political report aired by the station.

Omodu was sacked on the orders of the state military administrator, Col. Musa Shehu, after the radio station carried a report that the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP) senatorial primaries had been canceled and that one of the aspirants, Dr. Ombo Isokariari, had been disqualified.

The party's leadership had earlier issued a statement denying the radio report. But it is not clear why the government is interested in the matter.

### **Two Union Publications Banned In Osun State**

**O**sun State Military Administrator, Lieutenant-Colonel Anthony Obi, on March 26 proscribed two publications by rival factions of the state chapter of the National Employees (NULGE).

The banned publications are *NULGE News* and *The True NULGE News*.

A circular signed by the Secretary to the State Government, Mr. John Adelowokan, said the Administrator had ordered the immediate cessation of the production and circulation of the in-house publications in exercise of the powers under the Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 107 of 1993.

### **Akwa Ibom Govt. Suspends 2 Journalists**

**T**he Akwa Ibom State Government has suspended a journalists with government-owned newspaper, *The Pioneer*, and another with the State broadcasting station following reports carried by their media organizations.

Sam Akpe, a reporter with *The Pioneer*, was suspended without pay over an article analyzing the problems of an oil company operating in the state.

Roland Esin, who works with the broadcasting station, was similarly suspended without pay for airing a commentary criticizing the delay in the payment of salaries of worker in the state caused by the government's computerization exercise.

### **Police Assault Kwara Television Journalist**

**A**bdul Rahma Maliki, a journalist with Kwara State Television, was assaulted by policemen in Ilorin, the state capital, on March 10.

Maliki was in Ilorin to cover a demonstration by students of Kwara State polytechnic protesting the scarcity of petrol in many parts of the country, including the state, which has crippled commercial activities and resulted in high costs of goods and transport fares.

The policemen were trying to stop the demonstration when they observed Maliki recording the event. They immediately pounced on him and beat him up.

### **Tell Magazine Kaduna Bureau Chief Arrested**

**A** senior staff writer and Kaduna Bureau Chief of Tell Magazine, Danlami Nmodu, was arrested from his home in Kaduna at about 5.30.a.m. on March 27 by seven State Security Service (SSS) agents.

The operatives stormed his residence before dawn, made the arrest and drove away with him in their Peugeot station wagon to an unknown destination.

The security agents did not give any reason for Nmodu's arrest and he remained in detention without charge or trial at the month's end.

## **Journalism Training Programme**

### **University of Cambridge International Summer School on Censorship**

**T**he University of Cambridge in Britain will hold a two course on censorship in August as part of its main international summer school

The course," entitle Degrees of Censorship," will run from August 2 to 5 as part of Term II and will be directed by Derek Jones Editor of "Censorship –An international Encyclopedia ", to be published by Fitzroy Dearborn in 1999.

The course is premised on the notion that censorship is universal; that it has been present in some form throughout history, in all societies, and has been applied to all arts and media-notable, the printed word, film and broadcasting, the performing and visual arts.

The course will sample the enormous range of historical and contemporary censorship, from the totalitarian censorship of the major religion and ideological system, to the more subtle forms practiced in modern liberal democracies

It will compare past and present forms of censorship in different culture and raise question about the future of the practice.

During the course, the many form of censorship will be explored: image breaking to more subtle modern attempts to suppress ideas and information although public relations and the use of economic power.

It will consider institutional and self-censorship and examine arguments that have been used to justify censorship as well as those that have been used to condemn it.

According to the course organizers, whilst censorship is a phenomenon which many educated people are instinctively “against”, the course will raise the deeper “why” questions, examining particular cases in the widest possible context.

Students may expect a strong international flavour and a net of censorship which will cross many disciplines. Historical based, the course will also touch on art and literature, education, media studies, philosophy and political theory, psychology, the physical sciences and religion.

In addition to the special subject classes, participants will be able to make part in the wider activities of the summer School, including plenary lectures, excursions and cultural events.

The course on censorship is being introduced for the first time this year based on a survey carried out by the University last year on the need for the course. The organizer expect that if the programme stimulates interests and recruits well this year, they will consider establishing a separate Summer School or seminar on censorship in 1999.

The International Summer School, now in its 75th year, is open to anyone over the age of 18 who is willing to engage in a period of intensive study at university level.

Teaching is undertaken in the buildings of the university and participants stay in colleges grouped in and near the center of the city where they can appreciate some of the experience of college life. Non-residential attendance is also available for those who prefer to find their own accommodation.

Classes are normally limited to 25 participants, allowing for close and continuing discussion of the subjects studied.

The University will not be giving out any scholarships or financial aid for the programme this year and those interested have to find sponsorship from other sources.

Applications should be sent to International Programmes, University of Cambridge, Madingley Hall, Madingley, Cambridge CB3 8AQ, England. Telephone: 44 1954 210636, Facsimile: 44 1954 210677. Enquiries can be made at E-mail: rdi1000@cam.ac.uk

### **John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Program on Peace and International Cooperation**

**T**he John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in Chicago in the United States maintains a grant-making Programme on Peace and International Cooperation, otherwise known as international security studies.

Under the programme, the Foundation encourages scholars, journalists, policy analysis, and others from within or outside the United States to explore peace and cooperation issues in the context of economic and political change.

Grants vary from \$10,000.00 for an individual and up to \$120,000.00 for a two-person project for up to 18 months of research in an international setting.

Grant seekers under the programme should submit a two to three page letter of inquiry to Grants for Research and Writing in peace, security, and International Cooperation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, 140 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, IL 60603, U.S.A. Telephone: 312 726-8000. Web site: <http://www.macfn.ogr/>

### **Eugene C. Pulliam Fellowship**

**T**he Eugene C. Pulliam Fellowship provides \$30,000.00 to editorial writers for travel and study.

It also honours editorial writers by helping to broaden journalistic horizons and knowledge of the world.

To qualify, applicants must have had at least three years full-time editorial writing experience.

The deadline for applications is July 1.

Further information about how to apply can be obtained from Pulliam Fellowship, Sigma Delta Chi foundation, P.O. Box: 77, 16 South Jackson Street, Greencastle, IN 46135-0077,

U.S.A. Telephone: 317 653-3333, Facsimile: 317 653-4631. E-mail: spj@likd200.net. Web site: <http://town.hall.org/places/spj/>



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

- a. Promoting respect and recognition for press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria.
- 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 conducive 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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