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MRA Seeks Governing Boards For Govt. Media, Regulatory Bodies

Media Rights Agenda (MRA) has written to President Olusegun Obasanjo and Information Minister, Chief Dapo Sarumi, asking them to take urgent steps to constitute the governing bodies of four media establishments and two regulatory agencies in accordance with the enabling laws of the organizations.

The media establishments are the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), and the Voice of Nigeria (VON). The regulatory bodies are the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC).

In six separate letters sent to President Obasanjo and Chief Sarumi between January 17 and 21, 2000, MRA noted that the present situation where each of the organizations is being run by a Director-General in the absence of a properly constituted governing body as provided for in the laws establishing them was illegal as it violates the mandatory provisions of these laws and undermines the independence and diversity of outlook of the organizations.

Five letters were sent to President Obasanjo over the cases of the NTA, NAN, VON, the NBC and the NCC, while the sixth was sent to Chief Sarumi over the FRCN.

The NTA is established by the Nigerian Television Authority Act Cap. 321, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990. Section 2(1) of the Act provides for the appointment by the

National Council of Ministers, on the recommendation of the Minister of Information, of members of the Authority consisting of a Chairman, the Chairman of each of the Zonal Boards of the Authority, a Director-General, one representative of the Federal Ministry of Information, one representative of women's organizations in Nigeria, and six persons with requisite experience in the mass media, education, management, financial matters, engineering, and arts and culture.

The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria Act Cap. 140, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990, established the FRCN. Section 2(1) of the Act provides for the appointment by the Minister of Information, with the prior approval of the National Council of Ministers, of members of the governing body of the Corporation consisting of a Chairman, a Director-General, one representative of the Federal Ministry of Information, one representative of the Ministry of External Affairs, one person to represent women's interests in Nigeria, and six persons with requisite experience in the mass media, education, management, financial matters, engineering, and arts and culture.

The Voice of Nigeria Corporation Decree No. 15 of 1991 establishes VON. Section 2 of the Decree No. 15 provides for the appointment by the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, on the recommendation of the Minister of Information, of members of the Corporation consisting of a Chairman, a Director-General, one representative of the Federal Ministry of Information, one representative of the Ministry of External Affairs, one person to represent interest not otherwise represented on the Corporation, one person with requisite knowledge in Nigerian art and culture and three persons with requisite experience in the mass media, financial matters, and engineering.

NAN is established by the News Agency of Nigeria Act Cap. 290, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990. Section 3(1) of the Act, as amended by Section 3 of the News Agency of Nigeria (Amendment) Decree No. 87 of 1992, vests the management and responsibility for carrying out the objects of the Agency in a Board of Directors consisting of a Chairman, a Managing Director, one person to represent the Federal Ministry of Information and culture, one person to represent the Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria; one person who shall be a member of the private sector media organization to represent subscribers to the Agency; and head of the following departments of the Agency: Editorial, Technical, and Finance and Administration.

Responsibility for the appointment of the Chairman of the Board of Directors and the Managing Director for the Agency is vested in the President, on the recommendation of the Minister of Information by Sections 3(a) and 4(a)(2) of Decree No. 87 of 1992.

The National Broadcasting Commission is established by the National Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38 of 1992. Section 3(1) of Decree No. 38 of 1992 as amended by Section 3 of Decree No. 55 of 1999 provides for the Commission to be made up of the following members: a Chairman, a Director-General, and 10 other members to represent the following interests: law, business, culture, education, social science, broadcasting, public affairs, engineering, State Security Service, and the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture.

Section 3(3) of the principal Decree vests in the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces the powers to appoint the Chairman and other members of the Commission on the recommendation of the Minister of Information.

With regard to the NCC, Section 1(1) of the Nigerian Communication Commission Decree No. 75 of 1992 establishes the Commission. Section 3(1) of Decree No. 75 of 1992 as amended by Decree No. 30 of 1998 provides for members of the Commission, to be appointed by the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, on the recommendations of the Minister of Communications.

The decrees also outlines the membership of the Commission to include a chairman, an executive vice chairman, and eight other full-time or part-time Commissioners with requisite experience in any one or more of the following fields: commerce, consumer affairs, financial matters, industry, law, management, public administration, technology, and telecommunications engineering.

In the first letter dated January 17, 2000, over the constitution of the Authority for the NTA, MRA said it was writing to President Obasanjo in his capacity as the Chairman of the

Federal Executive Council, the successor to the National Council of Ministers, which is the body empowered under the NTA Act to appoint members of the Authority.

MRA noted in the letters that the present situation whereby the NTA, FRCN, VON, NAN, and the NBC were being run by Directors-General in the absence of properly constituted governing bodies as provided for by the laws setting up the different establishments was illegal as it violates the mandatory provisions of the various laws and undermines their independence and diversity of outlook.

MRA said it was concerned that despite the recent appointments of Directors-General for the NTA, FRCN, VON, NAN and the NBC, the government neglected to constitute governing bodies for the various establishments pursuant to the provisions of their enabling laws, with the result that there has been a perpetuation of illegality in their management. In the case of the NBC, MRA noted that this illegality has characterized the operation of the Commission since its establishment.

The organization also observed that although the News Agency of Nigeria Act provides for the appointment of a Managing Director as the Chief Executive of the Agency, the President had appointed a Director-General to run it.

It told the President and the Information Minister that it was using the letters to draw their attention to these grave lapses and to request them to take urgent steps to perform their statutory functions and comply with the provisions of the law.

MRA said if it did not get any indication from them within two weeks on what their attitudes to the request were, it would assume that they do not intend to give effect to the clear provisions of the various laws and that it would have no other choice than to approach the courts on the issue.

Government Media Regulation In Other Countries

In several African countries, media control is almost always a prerogative of government especially the government owned media.

Parading a motley crowd of self centered rulers, the main objective is to censor the media and allow for a reign of corrupt practices.

However, there could be seen a few exception across the continent. South Africa has one the most ideal and effective legal model in the region. The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) acts as an extra buffer between government and public broadcasting corporations. It has authority over the broadcast medium, both government owned and privately owned.

The IBA which is appointed after a public hearing is responsible to a standing committee of the National Assembly. It is assigned the duties of allocating frequencies; developing ethical standards; hearing complaints; and developing questions such as local content in programming to cross-media ownership. In South Africa, frequencies are allocated after public hearings and according to publicly available criteria.

The IBA has no power to interfere with the day-to-day management of any broadcast station as well as any right to interfere in the editorial content.

In Kenya, emasculated Constitutional provisions give power to the president to control the broadcast medium while also preventing private participation. The Board of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) is answerable to the Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Section 44 of the KBC Act states that: "If at any time it appears to the Minister that the Corporation has failed to comply with any of the provisions of this Act, he may, by notice in writing, require the board to make good the default within such time as may be specified."

The Minister alone has the right to determine what is good and what is not and this is usually determined by the ruling party's opinion.

In Malawi, the government, or more specifically, the ruling party, controls the airwaves. The then President, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, and one of his Ministers owned even the private print houses. Up to early 1993, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) was under

the control of the President but by late 1993, the responsibility of the MBC was passed on to the Minister of Information who at the end of the day is a party faithful appointed by the President. The MBC Acts regulates the industry in Malawi, both broadcast and print, government and privately owned. But the Acts vests enormous power on the Minister by which he can intervene directly on editorial matters. Section 16 of the MBC Act allows the Minister to make the MBC air whatever he sends to it while Section 17 also gives him the power to stop MBC from airing what he considers “contrary to the public interest.”

Independent stations need his approval for a broadcast license, which he can also revoke at any time. Independent stations are also required by Section 30 of the MBC Act to broadcast whatever the Minister gives them.

Again, the Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act regulates the publication and import of newspapers, magazines, books, films and records. Partial freedom came in September 1993 when the Public Affairs Committee, an umbrella group of churches, political parties and other multi-party activists and the President’s Committee on Dialogue agreed on a code of conduct which defined the aims of the MBC, which states among other things that the presentation of news should be in accordance with “generally accepted principles of journalism in pluralistic societies.”

Government in Malawi has the power to appoint the Board of management and interfere in editorial content.

In Mozambique, the Department of Ideological Works of the ruling FRELIMO Party controlled the mass media until the late 1980s. In 1989, the government was pressurized through a document titled “the people’s right to information” signed by a group of journalists, to give freedom to the press in the Constitution adopted in 1990.

After her independence in 1990, the Namibian government appointed an autonomous board of directors to run the affairs of the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) with freedom to decide its editorial and programme policy. However, the independence of the NBC was called to question when the government removed the word autonomous from its mission statement and a set of guidelines setting out the corporation’s objectives. Government is also its major funder, in which case it calls the tune.

The Tanzania government, in November 1993, enacted the Broadcasting Service Act which established the Tanzania Broadcasting Commission. Its aims, among others include issuing broadcasting license, supervising broadcasting activities, regulating the activities of broadcasters, plan and manage frequency spectrum. The commission is responsible to the Minister of Information.

In Zambia, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) has a board appointed by the minister of Information and Broadcasting Services who singularly is empowered to issue licenses for private stations.

In Ghana the Head of State appoints boards of the state-owned media. This was in line with the military rule that had been in place for a long time. But the democratic constitution which later came into effect with the return to constitutional democracy vests this responsibility on the Media Commission. However, the President has continued to perform this function. But on January 26, 2000 the Supreme Court of Ghana ruled that it falls within the powers of the National Media Commission (NMC) to appoint chairmen and other members of the governing bodies of public corporations managing state-owned media.

The court pronounced that the NMC should make appointments of editors, directors and other heads of state-owned media in consultation with the head of state.

By this ruling, the court said that all previous appointments made by President Rawlings were unconstitutional and therefore rendered null and void.

This court decision has put to rest a three year judicial battle between the NMC and the office of the Attorney General over the constitutionality of the President or his representative to appoint heads of state-owned media institutions.

While African government media regulatory bodies are used as instruments of censorship in western democracies regulatory bodies, where they exist are agents for the expansion of the frontiers of free speech and freedom of the media.

France has neither a national press council nor any other mechanism of press self-regulation. What is on the ground are unions of journalists, union of newspaper owners and a number of journalists' associations. These play very influential roles.

In Germany, all Landers have their own press laws, which are basically similar and follow the same pattern though they vary in details. Section 2 of the Lander press laws divests the government of authorisation to control press activities including the founding of publishing houses. Government however, registers the private broadcast sector.

There is the German Press Council, an autonomous, non-governmental, incorporated association established by the association of newspaper publishers and journalists in 1956 to introduce a measure of self-regulation.

The Swedish Press Council established in 1916 is the first in Europe and well developed for media self-regulation. It functions as a tribunal for media practice review. The council has six members: three members of the public including a Supreme Court Judge who serves as chair and three representatives of the industry. It seeks to encourage compliance with a Code of ethics.

The Australian federal parliament has limited power to enact laws directed only at the press. The Australian Electronic Media is governed by the Australian Broadcasting Services Act, 1992 (Cth). There is the Australian Press Council (APC) which is a voluntary body established in 1976 by the Australian Journalists Association and publishers in Australia. It is the principal body, which promotes press ethics in the continent. It has a chairman and ten representatives of the constituent organisations, two journalists, one member from a panel of editors, seven public members and 20 alternate members. Memberships of the APC are eminent and acknowledged as independent.

Canada has five provincial press councils in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec and a regional organisation – the Atlantic Press Council. There are also smaller self-regulatory bodies. In all the cases membership is voluntary and fairly balanced. They are also well respected by the public. Though there is no enforcement mechanism as such, the councils have been able to fairly and effectively uphold a high standard of conduct with the requirement that any newspaper named in a complaint must publish the council's determination.

A press council established in 1953 and staffed by media representatives was replaced in 1996 by the Press Complaint Commission (PCC) because of inconsistent ruling and its lack of sanctions. It has six lay members and nine press members. Funding is provided by the newspaper industry.

There are no press councils in the United States with government authority to adjudicate disputes or enforce standards.

One thing common to these regulatory bodies is that they are not bound by regimes and tenures.

IFJ, WAJA Clears Air On Status Of IPC

The controversy over the ownership and status of the International Press Centre (IPC) in Ogba, Lagos, has been resolved following clarifications by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the West Africa Journalists Association (WAJA), two of the international partners and founders of the project.

The groups in a public statement in January noted that the IPC “is an independent centre not linked to any political group and it represent the IFJ, WAJA and other projects on the ground.”

The groups' clarification follows a recent move by the executive of the Lagos State Chapter of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), to take possession of the centre, which it claimed is a project of the NUJ.

In the statement by Ms. Bettina, Peters, IFJ Project Director, and Kabral Blay-Amihere, WAJA President, the groups congratulated Lanre Arogundade, coordinator of the centre, and his staff on the work they have done to establish and strengthen the "IFJ/WAJA press centre", and noted that they are aware of recent reports in the Nigerian media where the NUJ claims ownership of the press centre.

While noting that they "are pleased with the interest the NUJ leadership is now taking in the press centre", the statement said that "the press centre is a resource for all journalists not just those who are members of the NUJ."

It acknowledged that: "We understand that the NUJ may be unclear as to the status of the IFJ/WAJA press centre, which is why we want to put the arrangements that have been made on public record."

It then gave a detailed background to the formation of the centre. According to the statement, following a mission of the IFJ and WAJA to Nigeria on March 7-15, 1999, it was decided that the press centre should be launched under the auspices of the IFJ and WAJA and not under the control of a single organisation.

The statement added: "The mission clearly understood the divisions among Nigerian journalists and it was agreed that in order to ensure that the press centre can function as a resource for all journalists it should be directly linked to the IFJ and WAJA. The press centre coordinator is therefore directly employed by the IFJ."

Continuing, it said: "The NUJ leadership was informed of this decision and has in the past supported the work of the press centre. The then NUJ President, Mr. Lanre Ogundipe, attended the official launch of the press centre in October of last year."

"Based on our experience with other press centres in the region, we know it is essential that these centres do not become part of political or other divisions in the media community", it said.

The IPC is a part of the Media for Democracy project, a programme run by several organisations. They include the IFJ, Article 19 - the London-based International Centre Against Censorship; Paris-based freedom group, Reporters sans Frontières (RSF); West Africa Journalists Association (WAGA); Media Rights Agenda (MRA); Journalists for Democratic Rights (JODER); the Independent Journalism Centre (IJC); and the NUJ.

Each organisation administers certain parts of the project. The statement explained that during the IFJ/WAJA mission to Nigeria it was agreed at a meeting with the NUJ Executive in Abuja that the NUJ would assist in the organisation of training seminars, in particular in the selection of participants to events.

It further said that with the change of leadership of the NUJ, its involvement was deemed necessary for re-activation. To this end, Ms. Peters said that she has written to the new NUJ president to invite him to a meeting to discuss the development of the project during her next visit to Nigeria.

"We look forward to strengthening the work with NUJ", she wrote, adding that "the NUJ has an important role to play in defending the professional and social rights of journalists. We hope we can focus on these issues in our future co-operation with them."

Journalism School Elects Leaders

Students of the Nigerian Institute of Journalism (NIJ) Ogba Lagos have elected nine officers to run the affairs of the Students Union Government for the 1999/2000 parliamentary year.

At the end of the keenly contested elections, mid December, the following students were elected: Mr. Igho Akeregha, HD2, as President; Miss Funmi Famuyiwa, ND1, Vice President; Adeleke Adeneye, General Secretary; and Bisi Omotosho, as Assistant General Secretary.

Others are Moses Owopade, who emerged as Public Relations Officer; Babatunde O. Kemi, Welfare Secretary; Charity Umukoro, Treasurer; Uche Nnadozie, Financial Secretary; and Sola Oyekanmi, who became Social Secretary.

The new President of the SUG, Akeregha, who has worked as a journalist with *The NEWS/Tempo/PM News*, told Media Rights Monitor after his election that the immediate task before him is to work closely with the management and the Nigerian Press Organisation (NPO) to secure accreditation for the institute's programmes.

He promised to elevate the dilapidating infrastructures in the school and collaborate with the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and other pro-media groups, both local and international, in the area of training the institute's undergraduates.

Stretching Beyond A *Sketchy* Crisis

Workers at the government-owned Sketch Press Limited began an indefinite strike action on January 18 to protest the poor condition of services in the company. They also accused the Board of Directors as insensitive and incompetent in managing the organisation.

The strike which began on January 4 with a sit-down action during which workers reported for duties but refused to work, transformed into a full industrial action when the seven-day ultimatum given to the management by the workers expired. Specifically, the strike action was embarked upon by the workers to press home their four-point demand. These include payment of arrears of five months salaries; settlement of arrears of leave bonuses and other allowances owed the workers; payment of gratuities and entitlements to 90 staff of the company whose appointments were terminated recently and the provision of medical services and facilities for them.

While reviewing the action of the workers, the board of directors said "any employee who fails to report for duty at the expiration of this notice (January 20) will be deemed to have voluntarily withdrawn his/her services to the company."

But, Mr. Diran Ademiju-Bepo, secretary of the Sketch Chapel of Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), said threats by management would not deter the workers from pressing their demands.

"We are not going back to work until our four-point demands are met," he said.

Ademiju-Bepo denied an earlier allegation by the management that the union did not follow laid-down procedures before embarking on the industrial action.

"We wrote the management and the letter was duly delivered to the administrative manager who ought to have informed the management," he said.

He said the union has the nod of the national body before it proceeded on the sit-down protest. He had earlier warned that if the management of the media house failed to meet their four-point demands the workers may be forced to embark on an indefinite strike.

Though the board of directors condemned the strike action, it agreed that the workers have genuine grievances which predate its tenure. It however, solicited for an atmosphere of peace, tranquility and collaboration of all the stakeholders - the owner states, the board of directors, the management, the staff, the advertisers and the general public to achieve the desired change.

In addition, the board expressed commitment to fundamental restructuring of the company to bring it back to viability so that it can meet its obligations.

Chief Areoye Oyebola, former editor of the Daily Times and a member of the board, said that the board could only appeal to the striking workers to go back to work as that is the only way to ensure that the newspaper generate revenue to meet its financial obligations.

Meanwhile, when the strike action began, management invited the police to disperse the striking workers who converged at the gate of the company's premises. No clash was recorded but the workers reconverged at the gate after the police left.

The national secretariat of the NUJ has indicated its support for the strike action of the workers.

In a statement issued by Muhammed Khalid, the NUJ national secretary noted that "the strike action is the culmination of the anger and frustration of workers over the treatment being meted out to them by their employers."

The present situation at the Sketch, according to NUJ, negates the vision of the founding fathers of the company which is to create a medium strong enough to publicise the activities of the owners in addition to serving as an industry where workers will have their rights and privileges respected and protected.

On January 21, the governors of the owner states of the media house met at Ibadan at the Office of Chief Lam Adeshina the Oyo State governor. They set up a two-man panel of enquiry to probe the affairs of Sketch Press while directing the striking workers to immediately return to their duty posts. The panelists are Chief Segun Osoba, Governor of Ogun State and Alhaji Lam Adeshina, his Oyo State counterpart. They are to look into the remote and immediate causes of the problems that have been besetting the media house for the past six years and as well make recommendations to the owner States on solutions to the problems.

The striking workers who demonstrated to the office of the Oyo State governor, carrying placards, while governors were meeting, refused to return to their duty posts saying it was only the leaderships of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the national NUJ that could call-off the strike.

MRA's ED Elected Vice Chair of Media Foundation

The Executive Director of Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Mr. Edetaen Ojo, has been elected as Vice Chair of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA).

He was elected on January 29 at a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Foundation held in Accra, Ghana, where Mrs. Maitre Soyata Maiga (Mali), the Vice President of the Malian Association of Lawyers emerged Chair person.

Also on the board of the Foundation are Mr. Adu Amankwaa (Ghana), Deputy Secretary General of the Trade Union Congress of Ghana; Mrs. Davidetta Browne Lansanah (Liberia), Programme Editor at Star Radio in Monrovia – Liberia; and Mr. Halidou Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso), President, Union Interafricaine des Droits de l'Homme (U I D H) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Other members of the board are Professor Takyiwaa Manuh (Ghana), a Lecturer at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana; and Mr. Soulé Issiaka (Benin Republic), Director, Radio Nederland Bureau Afrique in Cotonou, Benin Republic.

The Foundation has Mr. Kwame Karikari as Executive Director. Mr. Karikari is also the Head of the School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana and was formerly a member of the National Media Commission of Ghana.

The Media Foundation for West Africa is a regional independent non-governmental organization established in 1997 to promote an enabling environment for the professional development of media rights in West Africa.

The MFWA seeks to facilitate the development of a culture and institution for free expression in which the media and citizens can express themselves with no fear or threat of interference, reprisals or violation of their rights by any force, governmental or otherwise.

The primary activities of the Foundation are research on issues relating to media laws and policies; skills building for strengthening professionalism and social responsibility with the media; as well as providing a forum and opportunities for informed discussion of media issues.

OSBC Sacks 143 Staff, Reorganises Its Directorates

The Osun State government on January 11, 2000, sacked 143 staff, including four directors, of the Osun State Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC Radio and Television).

A breakdown of the sack figure showed that 89 staffers were sacked from the television services while 54 were from the radio section. The affected directors are Mr. Kayode Adedigba, director, News and Current Affairs- TV; Mr. Sam Bamidele, director, News and Current Affairs-Radio; Mr. Dokun Olawale, director, Commercial- TV; and Mr. Akinwale director, Engineering- TV.

The government also trimmed the directorate from 10 to three namely: Programmes, Engineering and Finance, and Establishment and Commercial Services. Four former directors were redeployed to the civil service. The secretary to the State government explained that the 're-organisation' was "based on general poor performance, concern for the generality of the people, the over bloated establishment, and the limited resources of government."

Meanwhile, Dr. Yemi Farounbi, was appointed to head the corporation's board, which was inaugurated the same day by the State governor Chief Adebisi Akande. The sack is believed to be in line with the governor's earlier vow to trim the state's work force.

In a related development, the state government has merged the radio and television station into a single broadcasting corporation to arrest what it described as "lack-lustre performance and aimless drift."

In a press release by the secretary to the state government, Mr. Sola Akinwunmi, government said the decision was part of the execution of the report of the audit Committee it set up to restructure the civil service.

Akinwunmi stated that in spite of the presence of "the best professionals in this industry in the country today" in both stations their output was nothing to write home about.

"Government cannot continue to watch helplessly without doing something urgent and serious to arrest the aimless drift," he stated.

GM, Editor Sent On Compulsory Leave

The General Manager of the Akwa Ibom State Newspapers Corporation, publishers of The Weekly and Weekend Pioneer, Mrs. Ekaette Ekpo; the Editor of the Weekend Pioneer, and the Marketing Manager Mr. Patrick Essien were in January ordered to proceed on compulsory leave with immediate effect.

A letter to this effect, dated January 2, 2000, signed by chairman of the board of directors of the newspaper, Mr. Nsikak Essien, said the action was to allow the barely one month old board to have access to the financial and other records of the newspaper corporation.

The letter regretted that 13 years after it was established, the newspaper was yet to break even but still depended on the government to pay staff salaries and other entitlements.

The Pioneer chapel of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) condemned the action describing it as illegal, unreasonable and unthinkable. A letter from the NUJ said in part: "It is our humble belief that the Nsikak Essien-led board was not acting within its constitutional powers which set it up."

Senator Threatens *The Guardian* Newspapers With Law Suit

The Senate Committee Vice Chairman on Public Accounts, Senator Isa Mohammed (PDP, Niger) on January 3, 2000, threatened to sue *The Guardian* newspaper for N1 billion over a publication, which he alleged is false and defamed his character.

Senator Mohammed held a press conference in Abuja where he said that he had decided to take the newspapers to court on account of its recent publication alleging that he was involved in certificate forgery. He said that he has resorted to court action because the publication was intended to “ridicule, embarrass and stop me from doing my job.”

He also declared that for “insulting students who have passed through the school” and for claiming that the school does not exist, both the community that established the school and the students would sue the newspapers up to the same amount.

Senator Mohammed stated that the publication was highly mischievous and not in the spirit of moving the country forward. “For a newspaper which claimed to stand for truth, I am very much disappointed that it has not lived up to its operational and professional ethics,” he added.

WAN Reports 70 Journalists Killed In 1999, Initiates Rehabilitation Work On Press In War-Torn Areas With UNESCO

At least 70 journalists and other media workers were killed while carrying out their work in 1999, the highest after 1994 when 73 journalists and media workers were killed, reports the World Association of Newspapers (WAN).

The year’s toll marked a dramatic increase in the number of media workers’ deaths after years of decline in deaths and was the highest since 1994, when 73 were killed, WAN said. Fifty-one were killed in 1995, 32 in 1996, 26 in 1997 and 28 in 1998.

The report states that wars were largely responsible for 1999’s high deaths, with 22 journalists and media workers killed in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and ten journalists and media workers assassinated in Sierra Leone.

Out of the 22 journalists and media workers killed in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 18 of them died in NATO bombardments -15 at the Yugoslavian state television building, and three in the Chinese Embassy.

On a country-by-country basis, other troubled spots for journalists were in Colombia where six were killed; Nigeria (5), Sri Lanka (5), India (4), Russia (4), Burma (2), East Timor (2), Angola (1), Argentina (1), Great Britain (1), Indonesia (1), Ivory Coast (1), Lebanon (1), Pakistan (1), Peru (1), Tajikistan (1) and Turkey (1).

“Wars were responsible for a large number of deaths last year,” said Timothy Balding, Director General of the Paris-based WAN, but added that journalists in many parts of the world were also murdered for their reporting and investigations.”

The deaths occurred right up to the last day of the year, when Anthony Mariyanayagam, a journalist for the state-run Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, was shot by suspected Tamil Tiger guerrillas while covering a church ceremony.

However, in the face of this increasing difficulty media workers face in carrying out their work in war-torn regions, WAN and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recently launched initiatives to help rebuild the press in East Timor, Kosovo, Serbia, and Macedonia.

Representatives of the organisations are currently visiting East Timor, where they are assessing local media needs with a view to helping rebuild the newspaper industry in East Timor. The delegation will then prepare funding opportunities and proposals for the international community, which has committed itself to rebuilding the press in East Timor, reports WAN.

The initiative in East Timor follows a similar WAN/UNESCO programme started in October 1999 to help rebuild the independent press in Kosovo and Serbia, and to further its growth in Macedonia.

That project seeks to “build a private distribution network for independent newspapers in Kosovo and Macedonia; to provide new private printing facilities for independent publications in Serbia; and to extend the existing independent distribution network in Serbia and Montenegro.”

ARTICLE 19 Conference To Discuss “The Right To Know”

The theme: “The Right to Know” in the context of freedom of information and Internet regulation, will form the focus of discussion at an upcoming conference from February 6 to 11, 2000, being organised by ARTICLE 19 - the London-based International Center Against Censorship.

The conference, which will be held in Oxford, United Kingdom, is being organised by the group in conjunction with the British Council.

ARTICLE 19, in a press statement, said participants and speakers will include Members of Parliament, lawyers, professors, activists and journalists. The conference will also address “official secrets... in the name of national security,” International War Crimes Tribunals in Bosnia and Rwanda, and the Pinochet case.

“Case studies on South Africa, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka will be presented and discussed,” says ARTICLE 19, while conference participants will also examine the UK’s freedom of information policies.

For further information, contact Ruth Brander of the British Council press office: Tel: +44 207 389 4878 or Ilana Cravitz/Katherine Huxtable of ARTICLE 19: E-mail: ilana@article19.org.

CJFE Gets New ED, Board Members

The Canadian Journalists For Free Expression (CJFE) has announced the appointment of a new executive director. He is Sharmini Peries. He succeeds Wayne Sharpe who resigned last October after four and a half years in office, to become a freelance consultant.

The new executive director, Peries, had served in the same capacity with an NGO, the Ontario Council of Agencies serving Immigrants, from 1994 to 1999.

From 1992 to 1994, she was executive director of the commission on Systematic Racism in Ontario Criminal justice System. Peries is also a member of Free Media Movement, an IFEX member in Sri Lanka, and is completing his PhD in social and political thought at York University.

Sharpe, while head of CJFE will also manned IFEX. His first project in office was working with a radio training project in Columbia.

Two new members have also been appointed into the board of the CJFE. They are Bob Carty, who works with Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio’s This Morning from Ottawa, and Sean Silcoff, a senior writer with Canadian Business and also vice-president of Toronto chapter of the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ).

CLO, Others Publish Manual For Tracking Government Repression

Four human rights groups have in a joint effort published a manual for tracking government-sponsored repression in Africa. The manual entitled: Monitoring State-sponsored Violence in Africa: A Practical Guide, is intended to assist African human rights activists who are seeking to track and challenge state-sponsored violence, especially ‘informal repression’, defined as

violence in which the hand of government is hidden or disguised and combat them wherever they are found.

The four collaborating groups are ARTICLE 19, the London-based International Centre Against Censorship; the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), based in Nigeria; the Network of Independent Monitors (NIM), based in South Africa; and the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC). The guide, the groups said, has been extensively tested in South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya.

The guide outlines the role of monitors; the qualities and skills of a good monitor – including independence, objectivity and impartiality - a code of conduct; preparation and follow-up; collecting evidence and statement-taking. It also covers different situations, from trial observation to fact-finding in armed conflict, and the basics of using national and international human rights mechanisms.

ARTICLE 19, in a statement, expressed the belief that although the guide has a strong focus on the African countries where the partners are based, the manual will also be of use in training human rights monitors not only in Africa, but possibly other continents.

The manual became necessary because of the increasing domestic and international scrutiny of governments' human rights records, which has resulted in an increase in covert, or "informal", forms of repression by African governments. This enables governments to evade accountability for human rights abuses.

ARTICLE 19 noted that if human rights violations can be characterized as 'violence' or 'tribal clashes' their real nature can be concealed by the governments, which carry them out, and there is an implication that responsibility for resolving them does not lie solely with the governments concerned. It warned that by presenting such incidents as the result of 'traditional' rivalries or 'ethnic' differences, the stereotype of Africa as a 'dark continent' riven with tribal conflict and unready for democracy, is reinforced.

FOIA Watch: FG Gazettes Freedom Of Information Bill

The campaign for legislation for Freedom of Information recently received a boost as the bill currently before the House of Representative was gazetted by the Federal Government.

The bill is being sponsored by Dr. Jerry Sonny Ugokwe, representing Idemili North/South Federal Constituency of Anambra State, Honourable Tony Anyanwu and Honourable Nduka Irabor. They are supported by twenty-five other legislators.

A collaborative effort by Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and Nigeria Union of Journalist (NUJ), the crusade for an enactment began seven years ago in 1993.

The bill when passed is crucial to entrenching a culture of transparency and accountability in government and in ensuring effective public participation in the democratic process.

It will provide legal muscles for officers working in government institutions to make public records and information more freely available to the public. With the law, Nigerians are guaranteed to receive within a specified period, such information and records for which there is public access.

The law, while providing for public access to public information and records, will also offer protection for serving public officers from adverse consequences for disclosing certain kinds of information without authorization.

Following the gazette, the bill will, in February, undergo preliminary consideration in the Lower House.

Already, MRA has began a massive media campaign to create awareness on the part of the general public, the media and other interest groups of the fact of the bill being before the

House and to solicit their support in creating and sustaining public awareness through the media for the enactment into law of the bill.

In a letter to notable individuals and groups, MRA's Director of Campaigns, Mr. Tive Denedo, said MRA is very much interested in the passage of the Bill just as "we expect that other Nigerians should be...", as the "success of the Bill and its eventual enactment will depend largely on the interest shown on the issue by Nigerians and the amount of pressure they can put on their legislators to pass the bill into law.

Mr. Denedo enjoined the media to give the bill necessary publicity noting that: "We believe this is one issue that qualifies as really important to the development of this country for which the media should help to create and maintain a massive awareness drive until the law is enacted."

New Technology Brings Radio Reception To Remote Regions

- **By Frederick Noronha**

Freeplay Energy, the makers of the innovative radio set that doesn't need batteries or mains electricity to run, has announced plans for new lighter and far-smaller models of its radios. These radio sets are seen as having immense potential in remote parts of the globe and the Third World, where power or batteries are not easily available.

In 1995 the British inventor Trevor Baylis designed a radio that could operate powered by a clockwork spring. It came into the market at the beginning of 1996 and one year later around 160,000 units had been sold.

Launching its "next generation" of wind-up radios, Freeplay Energy has now announced that its S360 model was one-seventh volumetric the size of the previous Freeplay radio, and under half the weight.

Freeplay's new radios take energy from three sources - daylight (via its solar panel), the patented wind-up spring mechanism and even mains electricity, if needed.

With an energy storage system, the radios can use energy immediately or save it for later. Besides, the radios can be wound up while playing, so no radio programming will be missed.

Freeplay S360, when fully charged, can provide up to 15 hours of radio listening. It was being quoted at a price of UK Pounds Sterling 59.95 and equivalence of about N10,500.00.

The Freeplay radio was originally designed for use in areas where there were no mains electricity or where batteries were extremely expensive. Much of the early production was purchased by aid charities working in Rwanda and other African countries where relief efforts were underway.

Despite injections of cash by British aid agencies and other sources of capital, Baygen said they could not survive by solely selling the Freeplay radio to the African market or to the developed world as goodwill purchases. Commercial units have been developed - some with special colours and others in clear plastic — for retail sales around the world.

Notably, in 1999 the Red Cross and the World Bank distributed 30,000 units to the Kosovo relief effort. The Freeplay Global Short-wave model is the latest invention of the clockwork spring radio.

The radio has a 35-mm x 93-mm solar panel, positioned atop it near the 80-cm long telescoping antenna which obviates the need for winding or the use of an optional a.c. adapter when the radio is in sunlight.

BusinessWeek pointed out that to help educate people about preventing AIDS, they began to distribute them through agencies in the developing world.

Recently, they've begun to sell the radios - for \$80 - to campers and boaters at Radio Shack, Sharper Image, and Sports Authority. This firm was reported to be in the lucrative

combination of doing good while doing business: From \$18.5 million in 1998, sales are expected to hit \$50 million this year.

Freeplay Energy says it sells over 100,000 of its radios and torches worldwide every month. It has manufactured nearly 2 million of its ingenious wind-up products since its launch in 1994. The company is now worth over \$75 million.

”Freeplay Energy’s philosophy is that business has an obligation to contribute to the communities in which it operates. For this reason, although its products could be made anywhere in the world, its two principal factories are in Cape Town, South Africa. These factories are owned and operated by a disabled workforce,” says the company.

Freeplay scientists are currently researching “hundreds” of uses for what the company calls ‘self-powered’ energy. Besides its radios, it offers self-powered lanterns, a useful emergency tool. This has a re-chargeable battery which can be used and recharged like a conventional torch.

In addition, however, the Freeplay generator can be wound up for 20 seconds to produce immediate light in an emergency - even if the battery is dead. This lantern has a see-through casing, that allows one to watch the revolutionary spring mechanism powering the generator and producing light inside the torch!

Ghana’s Media Commission To Appoint Boards Of State Media, Supreme Court Rules

On January 26, 2000 the Supreme Court of Ghana ruled that it falls within the powers of the National Media Commission (NMC) to appoint chairmen and other members of the governing bodies of public corporations managing state-owned media.

The court pronounced that the NMC should make appointments of editors, directors and other heads of state-owned media in consultation with the head of state.

By this ruling, the court said that all previous appointments made by President Rawlings were unconstitutional and therefore rendered null and void.

This court decision has put to rest a three year judicial battle between the NMC and the office of the Attorney General over the constitutionality of the President or his representative to appoint heads of state-owned media institutions.

The media institutions affected are Graphic Corporations (publishers of the West Africa magazine), Ghana News Agency, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and the New Times Corporation. (Media Foundation for West Africa).

500 Electronic Media Houses Collaborate To Celebrate International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

More than five hundred community radio stations from around the world under the banner of “Radio Voix Sans Frontieres”, are joining forces on March 21, 2000, to mark the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Radio Voix Sans Frontieres will be transmitted by satellite channels in North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. It will also be live on the Internet international short-wave radio and will be relayed by hundreds of local AM and FM community radio stations.

An international production team will co-ordinate the broadcast which goes on air for 24 hours on March 21 in addition to programmes, spots and jingles during the week preceding the International Day. The broadcast will look critically at the dangers and prevailing violations of

human rights in the form of racial discrimination in different parts of the world, as well as celebrating the richness and diversity of multicultural communities.

This is the third year for the flagship activity of AMARC, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters. The project centres on multilingual broadcasting using new and old communication technologies as part of a global campaign to combat racism and to promote cultural diversity.

UNESCO, Global Media Place Women In The News

An unprecedented number of monitors in about 80 countries will for one day in February scrutinise the portrayal and representation of women in the news on television, radio and in newspapers. To guarantee its success, UNESCO has launched an operation to appeal to news media establishments to place the editorial responsibility under women on May 8 in commemoration of the International Women's Day.

The results of the February media monitor code-named: Global Media Monitoring Project 2000, being organised by the World Association for Christian Communication in collaboration with Erin Research, Media Watch Canada, and media specialist, Margaret Gallagher, will be presented at the review of the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women in June and will be published later in the year in both print and on the Internet.

The research aims to assess changes that have occurred in half a decade. It is hoped that the result will provide a valuable insight into the situation of women in the media in the 21st century and in the context of the advancements made in media technology.

This collective study is particularly timely as preliminary results will be available at Beijing on June 5, when the Platform for Action of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women will be reviewed.

Meanwhile, UNESCO Director-General, Koïhichi Matsuura, in a statement said the world body hope to make March 8 "a day to remember by seeing to it that women make news," adding that if journalists, the media and the organisations that represent them come together to make this initiative a success, then for the first time in history a day's news output in both print and broadcasting, throughout the world, will fall under the editorial responsibility of women.

He said that: "By drawing attention to the glass ceiling that still limits the number of women journalists who rise to key editorial positions in the media, UNESCO is pursuing the commitment made at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 to defend equal professional opportunities for women. I firmly believe that this issue must remain at the forefront of the agenda of each society - and of the international community - until gender balance is achieved at every level in the work place.

"Through this focus on equal opportunities in the media, UNESCO also wants to emphasise another important point: the free flow of independent and pluralistic information is best ensured if all talented journalists have an equal chance of becoming editors and media executives, purely on the basis of their professional ability and without regard to gender, ethnic origin, religion or any other unconnected factor.

He said the International Women's Day provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the situation of women and to seek responses to the obstacles they face.

UNESCO considers it up to each media organisation to determine how it implements the initiative. For media organisations where no woman has ever held a key editorial position, the opportunity could mark an important step forward not only for the chosen journalist but for the entire editorial team and for their public. Women who already occupy executive positions in their media organisation could either ensure that they are on duty for that day's news output or that they are replaced by other women journalists.

UNESCO invites media organisations to register their participation in the initiative through the newly created Website (www.unesco.org/march8). Reactions and proposals are also welcome and can be posted on the site.

Legal Assistance Programme For Journalists / Writers

Media Rights Agenda offers legal assistance to journalists who are physically assaulted, arrested, detained or harassed and intimidated in other ways as a result of their work.

However, when journalists are detained, it is often difficult to secure authorization from them, their employers or family members to undertake legal action on their behalf.

In order to forestall situations where we are unable to represent deserving journalists who could ordinarily like to challenge the violation of their rights, we are compiling a bank of authorization which would enable us take action immediately such violations occur.

If you are a journalists or writer and you would like Media Rights Agenda to undertake legal action on your behalf should you become a victim of any form of rights infringement, please send a letter of authorization now to the Legal Directorate of MRA in the following format:

(Address and Date)

The Legal Directorate
Media Rights Agenda
44, Alhaja Kofoworola Crescent
Off Obafemi Awolowo Way, Ikeja
P. O. Box 52113, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria
Tel.: 234-1-4930831, Fax: 4930831
E-mail: mra@rcl.nig.com

Dear Sir,

LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION TO MEDIA RIGHTS AGENDA

I hereby apply to be a beneficiary of the Legal Aid Project undertaken by Media Rights Agenda's Legal Directorate.

It is understood that your approval of this application confers a general authority on Media Rights Agenda to institute legal action in my name and on my behalf to enforce my fundamental rights, whenever infringed, and without further assurance than this letter.

Yours faithfully,

(Name and Signature).

MRA LEGAL SERVICES: “You Have No *Locus Standi*”

- Agabi To MRA

The Attorney General of the Federation has questioned Media rights Agenda's *locus standi* to sue it over inconsistencies in Section 14(a) of the National Broadcasting Commission (Amendment) Decree No. 55 of 1999 and paragraph 1(6) of the 4th Schedule to the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

In a notice of preliminary objection filed on January 14, 2000, the Attorney General, represented by D. O. B. Badejogbin, a senior legal Officer, says that the Media Rights Agenda

does not possess the *locus standi* to institute the action and that the Federal High Court does not have jurisdiction to entertain the matter.

This action began through an originating summons at the Federal High Court Lagos, by Mr. Maxwell Kadiri on behalf of the incorporated trustees of Media Rights Agenda and Mr. Edetaen Ojo, executive director.

In the suit filed on September 30, 1999, the plaintiffs are praying the Court to decide once and for all the issue of who is entitled to collect radio and television license. They are contending that by virtue of paragraph 1(b) of the Fourth schedule of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Local Government Councils are responsible for collecting rates for radio and television licenses as part of their main functions. However, Section 14(A) of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) (Amendment) Decree No. 55 of 1999 confers the same right to collect radio and television license fee on the NBC.

They, therefore, contended that these two provisions are inconsistent as a radio or television owner would have a problem of deciding the right institution to pay radio and television license fees to, whether the Local Government or the NBC. It contended further that radio/television owners stands the risk of paying twice if the issue is not properly addressed by a court of law as any of the two institutions could contest payment made to the other.

As a result of this conflict, the plaintiff requires the intervention of the Honourable Court to resolve the conflict between these legislations.

If the above question is answered in the affirmative, then MRA would also want the Court to determine whether the said Section 14(A) of the N.B.C (Amendment) Decree No. 55 of 1999 is not thereby null, void and of no effect owing to its inconsistency with the aforesaid provision of the Constitution.

Joined, as respondents in the suit are the Ikeja Local Government, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Attorney General of the Federation.

Following the contention by the attorney general that MRA has no *locus standi* to file the case and that the Court lacks jurisdiction to hear it, MRA on January 27, 2000, wrote to the Court Registrar to set down the suit for hearing.

Police Raids International Press Centre, Arrest Journalists

Echoes of the military dictatorship recently reverberated under the democratic government of President Olusegun Obasanjo when a detachment of 50 armed policemen invaded the International Press Centre (IPC), Ogba in Lagos. Led by one Commissioner Sobodu of Rapid Response Squad (RRS), the policemen threatened to shoot those present and arrested four journalists. Those arrested were taken to Ogba Police Station where they were detained.

Among them were Messrs Wale Adeoye and Tunde Aremu of The Punch newspaper, Nicholas Nwafor, The News/Tempo magazines, and Lekan Otufodunrin, National Co-ordinator of Journalist for Christ.

According to Lanre Arogundade, IPC's Administrator, in a press statement, said: "more than 50 policemen who were driven into the premises in about 20 vehicles stormed the International Press Centre and promptly arrested everybody they met in the hall.... [and] threatened to shoot at sight."

The police were apparently hoping to apprehend members of the Oodua Liberation Movement (OLM), a pan-Yoruba socio-cultural organisation, which had been declared illegal government. The group had just rounded off a press conference when the police arrived.

Arogundade explained in the press statement that the IPC had, in the previous week, received a request from the OLM to use its conference hall for the purpose of a press conference at 10.00am on Wednesday January 19, 2000. The request was granted.

The Conference hall is commercialized and is one of the facilities available at the centre.

The others being the computer centre, library, boardroom and offices.

According to the press statement, the Centre's staff member Tinuke Aderemi was also arrested. Other staffs were threatened and questioned while office files and materials were searched and ransacked by police.

Mr. Sobodu asked Mrs. Aderemi if she could identify Mr. Ganiyu Adams and wanted to know if he came to the premises to address a press conference. She explained that Mr. Adams was a stranger to her saying that he (Adam) or his group neither sought permission to use the hall nor came to the premises to speak with the press. Her explanation that the press conference was limited to the conference hall fell on deaf ears as the policemen ordered her to lead them into all the offices which they ransacked by upturning documents and files. They equally demanded for all receipts relating to the hall.

One of the policemen removed the centre spread of the day's Post-Express (Wednesday Jan 19, 2000) and took it away. The pages had stories on the Alliance for Democracy. Soon afterwards, those arrested were released without charges.

After the harassment, arrests and ransacking of offices, the armed invaders drove off but left behind four (4) armed policemen. They were, however, gone by the following morning when workers arrived to resume duty.

Arogundade, in the statement said IPC considers the invasion of its conference room/offices and the arrest of journalists within its premises an assault on press freedom, reminiscent of the repressive era of General Sanni Abacha.

"We wish to demand an unreserved apology for the unwarranted-armed intrusion and the immediate withdrawal of the four policemen stationed at our premises," the statement added.

Several other free press and freedom of expression groups similarly decried the siege describing it as "reminiscent of the repressive era of General Sanni Abacha". Among the groups are the West Africa Journalists association (WAJA) and ARTICLE 19. WAJA said in a statement that the assault serves to "undermine the ongoing democratic process in Nigeria... (and)... an assault on press freedom in the new Nigeria."

ARTICLE 19 urged the government to enact "fundamental legal and practical reforms" to protect groups such as this from attack and "accelerate the reform process."

ATTACKS ON THE PRESS IN JANUARY 2000

Bomb Scare at *The Guardian* Newspapers' Premises

Information and news flow were disrupted for over an hour on January 17, 2000 at *The Guardian* newspaper offices following an anonymous call at about 11.30 which warned that a bomb was planted in the premises timed to go off at noon. Fifteen minutes later, another call came from the same caller emphasizing his earlier assertion.

The management of *The Guardian* Press Limited alerted the Lagos State Police Commissioner, Mr. Mike Okiro. Six policemen of the bomb disposal squad from Ikeja, led by Mr. S. Balogun, a chief superintendent of police arrived at Rutam House at about 1.45 p.m. They were armed with sophisticated bomb detectors and other equipment. All the workers were evacuated while the police searched all the offices and other key operational areas of *The Guardian* Press with their bomb detecting equipment for over an hour. No bomb was found.

The Police said they were making efforts to trace the caller.

Armed Robbers Attack *ThisDay* Newspaper Office

A gang of five armed men raided the Ikenne Close, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) offices of *ThisDay* newspapers at 3.00 am on January 3, 2000. The gang, armed with

dangerous sophisticated weapons, forcefully broke into the offices, beat up staff and stole items including a briefcase containing eight thousand naira (N8,000.00), a return ticket to Lagos and other valuables.

The operation, which was said to have lasted for about one and a half hour, left the deputy editor (Abuja Bureau) of the newspaper, Mr. Kenneth Tadeferua, badly wounded. He was later taken to an hospital in Abuja for treatment.

The office complex of *ThisDay* in Abuja also houses some staff of the newspaper. The FCT police, which confirmed the incident, said investigations were being carried out over the incident but no arrest had been made as at the end of the month.

This was the second time armed bandits would be raiding *ThisDay* Offices in the last four months. In the early hours of October 21, 1999, about six armed bandits raided the Lagos offices of the newspaper injuring two staff and stealing personal items and valuables.

Traditional Ruler Berates The Press

The Emir of Ilorin, the traditional ruler of the Kwara State Capital and a one-time judge of the Supreme Court, Alhaji Ibrahim Sulu Gambari, berated the press on January 7, 2000 for allegedly over-blowing the reports of the recent cases of vandalisation of churches in Ilorin by people suspected to be muslim fanatics. The Emir debunked press reports that churches were burnt maintaining, “no single church was burnt during the disturbance.”

But in another breath, he admitted that some churches were vandalised. He said: “It is unfortunate that the media over-reported the religious crisis, portraying this peaceful city as unsafe.”

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in the State, however, debunked his assertion that no church was burnt saying that it has both still and video pictures of the burnt churches. It later published some of the pictures in an advertorial in some newspapers.

Villagers Threaten To Kill Reporter

Mr. Eubaldus Enahoro, a reporter with the Edo State-owned newspaper, The Observer, was in mid-January declared missing after villagers at Adeje, a village near Warri in Delta State reportedly chased him with intent to harm him. Mr. Enahoro had gone to the village to report on the scene of a vandalised petroleum pipe where the villagers were siphoning fuel for sale. The villagers angered by his presence threatened to kill him. He ran into the bush and was subsequently declared missing by his employers when he did not show-up in the office that day. He was, however, able to find his way out of the bush the next day.

A photojournalist of the same newspaper, Mr. Sunday Osadebamwen, was similarly earlier on January 10 chased by the villagers but was rescued from being lynched by the timely intervention of some soldiers who led him from the scene to freedom.

Governor Adamu Lambastes Journalists

Alhaji Abdulahi Adamu, the Nassarawa State governor chided the press allegedly for not reporting anything positive about the State or its policy makers except negative stories.

According to him, “no good thing we do hits headlines. Since we came into government, there was never a front-page story in any print media (sic) about myself or my deputy or the speaker of the State House of Assembly or any important event in Nassarawa State.”

He lamented that, “the only time we hit the headline was when somebody wanted to run us down.” He denounced the situation where only a few national dailies cover news events in the State adding that even most of the news reports are published far too late than desired.

Benin Republic Embassy Press Attaché Killed

The Press Attaché to the Embassy of the Republic of Benin in Abuja Nigeria, Mr. Sunday Adhlakoun, has been reported killed. The foreign ministry reported on Tuesday, January 11, 2000 that his body was found at the weekend at the border road between Nigeria and Benin Republic riddled with bullets from automatic weapon's fire.

The late Mr. Adhlakoun was a former announcer at the Benin's State Broadcasting Service. He took up press attaché job in October 1999.

Journalist Complains Of Threat To Life

The Edo state correspondent of the *Nigerian Tribune*, Mr. Suyi Ayodele, on January 12, 2000, raised an alarm over the threat to his life by people suspected to be agents of the Edo State government, over a story published in the *Saturday Tribune* of January 8, 2000. The story, written by him, was on a "millennial raffle draw" organised by the Edo state government.

In a letter to his employers, he said he was particularly worried about the threat implied in the last paragraph of a "sponsored article" in the Edo State owned newspaper, "The *Observer*", where he was warned that he could bear the consequences of his write-up.

"Today, again, January 12, 2000, a five-page sponsored article was written on the said publication by one Hon. Sunny Uyigie, and it was carried by *The Observer* on Page 5, he said, adding, "the last paragraph of the said article is no doubt a threat on my life. Giving the antecedents of the people involved, one cannot just treat the threat with a kid's glove."

Adesanya, Others Blame The Press For OPC's Troubles

Chief Abraham Adesanya, politician and chieftain of the Yoruba ethnic socio-cultural group, Afenifere, has blamed the mass media for their roles in the violent activities of the militant faction of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC)

Speaking to newsmen at his Apapa-Lagos home, Chief Adesanya observed: "These so-called OPC crises are fanned by pressmen." He did not expatiate further.

In the same vein, chieftains of both the Fasehun and Ganiyu Adams'-led factions of the OPC also accused the press of being responsible for their woes in recent times. They castigated the press for being hostile to OPC and casting it in bad light in the eyes of the public. The leaders of the two factions spoke at various times and places to newspaper correspondents.

Mr. Kayode Ogundamisi, Secretary of the Fasehun faction accused the press of giving too much attention to the Ganiyu Adams' group thereby encouraging the reign of anarchy. Alhaji Lateef Oshodi of the Ganiyu Adams' faction also lashed at the press accusing them of shunning their press conferences simply because theirs was regarded as lowly and lacking eminent Yorubas with social and political clout. Another Adam's supporter, Mr. Gbenga Olowoseye accused the press of painting the Adams' faction in a bad light.

Governor's Aide Assaults Journalist, Removed

Mrs. Obed Nebo, a security detail attached to the Enugu State Governor, Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani, on January 15, 2000, assaulted Mr. Uche Maduemesi, *TELL* magazine Correspondent in Enugu State. She assaulted and slapped in the face several times the journalist in the presence of the Enugu State governor. The cause of the unwarranted attack was not known.

The incident took place at the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) Press Centre in Enugu at the wedding reception of two journalists, Mr. Afam Edozie and former Miss Chibota Onuora, both of the National Light newspapers.

Apparently endorsing the attack, the governor was reported to have told the journalist to publish the attack in TELL magazine if he liked. Reports have it that the governor had, the day before the attack, accused the correspondent of writing hostile report about his government.

The Eastern Zone of the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) in a statement by its Vice Chairman, Mr. Uba Abam, condemned the incident describing it “as the height of lawlessness and an affront against the nascent democracy in Nigeria.” It subsequently gave the governor a seven-day ultimatum within which to apologise to Mr. Maduemesi or be sued by it.

On January 22, 2000, journalists in Enugu State under the auspices of League of Practicing Journalists after a meeting expressed “grave concern over their incessant harassment by agents of government.” They resolved they would at all time, protect and project the interest of its members and to resist further harassment within the confines of the law.

Following the threat by the CLO to sue the governor and the resolve of the LPJ to black-out government activities, the security official was removed as the governor’s security detail. The governor later apologised for the assault.

Dismissed Daily Times Staff Protest

Over 100 dismissed staff of Daily Times Press Ltd, a subsidiary of Daily Times PLC demonstrated on January 14, 2000, over their unfair sack by the new management of Daily Times PLC. The protesting staff alleged that they have sacrificed much and were still being owed over ten months’ salary arrears before their appointments were wrongfully terminated.

Their termination letter, according to an affected staff did not specify remuneration to them in lieu of notice. She added that the exercise was a process to remove old experienced hands and replace them with inexperienced ones through favouritism.

The General Manager of daily Times, Mr. Yomi Oladimeji, confirmed the sack saying it was part of a re-organisation process going on in the Daily Times Group.

Journalist Assaulted and Detained

Mr. Igba Ogbole, a journalist with Radio Benue Makurdi was on January 19, 2000, assaulted, arrested and detained by men of the Nigerian police. He was stripped naked and detained in a cell full of hardened criminals, where he was severely beaten by the inmates.

Mr. Ogbole, producer of a weekly personality programme, “View Point” on Radio Benue, had invited the Benue State Police Commissioner, Mr. Sunday Aghedo, to feature in the programme. But the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Ike Nwosu, was said to have indicated his interest to represent the Police Commissioner.

On being told that by the nature of the programme only the Commissioner of Police could feature and not a subordinate officer, Mr. Ike got angry and ordered an inspector to arrest Ogbole and detain him. He was released after some police officers interceded on his behalf.

Mr. Ogbole subsequently petitioned the General Manger of Radio Benue, the State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the State Commissioner for Justice protesting his arrest, detention and humiliation. He explained that apart from physical torture, he suffered a great deal of mental torture since that was his first experience in a police cell.

The state commissioner of police, however, later apologised for the barbaric behaviour of the police image-maker.

OPC Threatens to Deal with Journalists

The Oyo State Chapter of the Oodua Peoples’ Congress (OPC) has threatened to deal with journalists for what it considered negative reports of its activities by the media.

The State Chairman of the group, Mr. Dauda Akala, made the threat on January 20, 2000, at Ibadan when he led the executives of the group to see the Oyo State Governor, Alhaji

Lam Adeshina. He decried the negative impression allegedly given the group by some national dailies which portray its members as hoodlums and miscreants.

In the words of Mr. Akala: “OPC does not condone hooliganism and other vices. We are responsible people with intellectuals among us, and are only against injustice being perpetuated against our people.”

He said the group was interested in protecting the ideals and legacies left behind by the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. He then solicited the governor’s effort in calling journalists to order.

Governor Turaki Shuns Local Journalists

Jigawa State Governor, Alhaji Ibrahim Saminu Turaki, in January 2000 invited journalists from Lagos State for a press briefing, leaving out their counterparts based in the state.

The state-based journalists, who were billed to over the governor’s budget presentation and a special press briefing together with the invited Lagos journalists, were only allowed to cover the budget presentation. They were, however, left out of the press briefing, which took place in the governor’s house without their knowledge.

The correspondents waited for over three hours at the government house only to realise that the governor had briefed their Lagos counterparts in his residence.

According to the report neither the director of press nor his assistant told the correspondents why the governor decided to brief only the Lagos journalists.

Reports said that the sidelining the state-based journalists by the governor might not be unconnected with the fear of critical questions likely to be asked by them being on the ground as well as being abreast of the issues and the problems of the state.

JOURNALISM / PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS

Call For Nominations For IWFMF Courage In Journalism Awards

The International Women’s Media Foundation (IWFMF) is currently seeking nominations for its Courage in Journalism Awards.

The awards “honor journalists for demonstrating extraordinary strength of character in pursuing their craft under difficult or dangerous circumstances – physical danger, official secrecy or oppression, political pressure, or any other professionally intimidating obstacles.”

Full or part-time journalists including reporters, writers, editors, photographers and producers are eligible to apply. Up to three individuals will be selected for the awards. Last year’s winners include Sharifa Akhlas of Afghanistan, Aferdita Kelmendi of Kosovo, and Kim Bolan of Canada.

The prize consists of US \$2,000 and a crystal sculpture which symbolizes freedom and courage. The awards will be presented to the selected recipients in ceremonies held in New York City and Los Angeles in October 2000.

Applicants must submit a letter of nomination, a brief biography highlighting “the nominee’s work history as it relates to the award,” the nominee’s resume or “Curriculum Vitae”, a writing sample representative of the nominee’s work, and current contact information for the nominee.

The deadline for the nomination is April 14. More information can be obtained by contacting Amy Johnson, Program Director, E-mail: ajohnson@iwmf.org.

RSF Awards Grants To Journalists In South East Asia

Journalists from four Southeast Asian countries have been awarded grants by Reporters sans frontières (RSF).

Moe Aye of Burma, Fathi Aris Omar of Malaysia, Ham Kak of Cambodia, and a journalist from Vietnam who remains anonymous for security reasons, were recognised with the grants.

According to RSF, the recipients were selected due to “their commitment to press freedom in countries where it is not respected by the authorities,” adding that these journalists have also struggled financially due to their commitment to “maintain an independent editorial line.”

Through the grants, which consist of US\$1,000 each, RSF hopes to contribute to “the consolidation of an independent private press in Southeast Asia.”

Moe Aye of Burma is a Bangkok correspondent of the Oslo-based radio station Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), occasional writer for Thailand’s The Nation, and author of two books on torture and prison conditions in Burma. Having spent six years in prison for criticising the military junta, and for his involvement with the National League for Democracy (NLD), he has lived in exile in Thailand since 1997.

Fathi Aris Omar of Malaysia ceased working for newspapers affiliated with the government to become a leading staff member of the online daily Malaysiakini.

Ham Kak of Cambodia is a journalist for the Khmer-language weekly Sakarach Thmei (The New Era) and Fellow of the Royal University of Phnom Penh. Since Sakarach Thmei was forced to cease publishing due to financial difficulties, Ham Kak has been working with a group of young journalists to re-launch the weekly.

Lorenzo Natali Prize For Journalism

Applications are invited from journalists, writers and researchers to submit entries for the Lorenzo Natali Prize for Journalism. Alternatively, proposal for nomination of a journalist, publication or communication medium, distinguished by a special effort to defend human rights and development in developing countries can be made.

Articles addressing democracy or human rights as vital aspects of development, written in any of the official European Union and published between April 1, 1998 and March 31, 1999 in a newspaper or magazine in a developing country or a member State of the EU are eligible for entry for the Natali Prize.

Articles in duplicates must be received on or before April 15, 2000 to Lorenzo Natali Prize, International Federation of Journalists, Rue Royale 226, B-1210, Brussels or the Public Relations Officer, Office of the European Commission in your country. Its Nigerian address is 3, Idowu Taylor Street, Victoria Island, P. M. B. 12767, Lagos.

An independent jury made up of media, development, human rights professionals and Commission staff will examine articles and put to the Commission a shortlist of three from both EU and developing countries, which would be submitted, to the European Commission.

The prize, which would be awarded on July 15, 2000, will see the emergence of two winners, one each from an EU and a developing country. Both will receive Euro10,000 each. A decision may also be taken to award no prize.

Entering the competition is on full acceptance of its conditions and permission for the European Commission to reproduce and disseminate the works submitted in its publications and publicity materials for the Natali Prize.

The Freedom Forum/ American Society of Newspaper Editors International Journalism Exchange (IJE)

Open to editors who have worked in journalism for at least five years, are currently employed by a daily newspaper, are between the ages of 21 and 50, are proficient in English, but have no substantial previous travel to the United States.

Eligible applicants are from any nation outside Western Europe and North America. Priority is given to editors from countries in transition to democratic rule. The five-week program begins in Washington, D.C. with an orientation and professional seminars preceding a

month-long newspaper assignment which offers exposure to all departments of an American newspaper.

It concludes with a couple of days of professional group activities and the final evaluation of the program in New York City. Contact: Elzbieta Krzanowska, International Center for Journalists, 1616 H Street, NW, Third Floor, Washington, D.C., 20006; Tel: (202) 737-3700; Fax: (202) 737-0530; E-mail: editor@icfj.org

Deadline is May 14.



***“Every person shall be entitled to
freedom of expression, including freedom to hold
opinions and to receive and impart ideas
and information without interference”***

Chapter 4, Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution
of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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