2003: Many Journalists May Be Killed - NUJ President

Except by sheer providence, bloodshed and hazardous times await journalists and the Nigerian media come 2003 elections. Many journalists have abandoned ethics and professionalism, resulting in a very high level of corruption in the media.

This was the grim picture painted by the National President of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Mr. Smart Adeyemi, while speaking in an interview with Media Rights Monitor recently (see below).

Mr. Adeyemi berated many media owners and managers for failing to meet their financial obligations to journalists and other media workers, a situation which he said leaves journalists with no other option than to accept inducements to make ends meet. The consequence of this, he said, is that there is no press freedom.

According to him, "... I believe that there is no press freedom under this dispensation. Because essentially when you say press freedom you talk about the ability of a reporter to write his story without any fear. You don't talk about press freedom because if there is corruption, it means the average reporter is not free. He is involved, he compromises and this is so because the welfare of the Nigerian journalist is damned very poor. That explains the high level of corruption you have today".

Speaking further, Mr. Adeyemi said "... you can't talk about ethics to a man that is hungry, you can't talk about ethics to a man who has not received his salaries, who has not paid his house rents and you are asking him not to accept a bribe? Of course he is going to compromise in spite of whatever is called ethics and is going to get his job done for the man who is paying".

He, however, revealed that the NUJ has drafted a bill, Journalists Welfare Bill, which it intends to pass on to the National Assembly. The Bill is intended to address the welfare of journalists. Essentially, the bill he said proposes that it be made mandatory for media owners to appoint only professionals to manage and run media houses and that investors who wish to venture into media organisations must put aside a specific sum regarded as Security Deposit.
The deposit shall serve the purpose of defraying salary arrears of journalists when the organisation fails or neglect to pay for three months.

While acknowledging fears that such a law would appear to negate the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which in Section 39 gives the right to own a means of mass media to citizens, he justified the provision of the NUJ Bill with the numerous instances where media organisations owe journalists for several months and sack them afterwards without compensation.

According to Mr. Adeyemi, "... what we are advocating is that there must be security deposit for anybody that is going to set up any media organization and it is going to be in categories. We believe that with that, if salaries are not paid for may be after three months, according to the draft, we go to the bank, withdraw the money, pay our colleagues and declare that organisation bankrupt and it will be shut down".

Mr. Adeyemi also defended the media tour organised jointly by the NUJ and the Federal Ministry of Information. He denied allegations that he used the opportunity to seek financial inducement and solicit contracts from some governors.

While describing allegations of seeking inducement from governors as sheer blackmail and propaganda, he insisted that the tour was informed by NUJ's appreciation of its professional and social responsibility imposed on it by Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which empowers the press to monitor governance and ensure accountability.

The NUJ president gave indications that the union was ill at ease with the ban on Beat Associations, saying that discussions were on between it and other stakeholders on the issue.

Projecting into what the media might look like during the forth-coming year 2003 election, Mr. Adeyemi said he foresees a "very rough period ... a situation where many journalists may be killed in Nigeria".

He accused journalists of allowing politicians to buy them. He warned: "If you allow them to corrupt you and you dance to their tune, don't forget that the man that is asking you to carry a particular report has opponents and those opponents may not forgive you".

While blaming the alleged compromise on the "high level of poverty" he said the future of the press "is very bleak".

On practical steps the union is taking to tame corruption in the media in order to avert the bleak future, he revealed that the various professional associations in the media including the NUJ, the NPAN and the NGE have met with the Minister of Information. The meeting is aimed at resolving the disagreement regarding the Nigeria Press Council in order to inaugurate the body. This he said would enable the body begin investigations of reports of professional misconduct and imposition of appropriate disciplinary measures where members are found guilty.

“Many Journalists Are Corrupt” - Adeyemi

How would you rate the level of journalism practice in Nigeria presently in terms of adherence to ethical standards and professionalism?

I think to a large extent we have not been performing badly. But that is not to say that there is no room for improvement. A lot of people believe that under democratic dispensation there is press freedom. But I believe that there is no press freedom under this dispensation. Because essentially when you say press freedom you talk about the ability of a reporter to write his story without any fear. Presently there is very high level of corruption in the media and where there is corruption, you don't talk about press freedom because if there is corruption, it means the average reporter is not free. He is involved, he compromises and this is so because the welfare of the Nigerian journalist is damned very poor. That explains the high level of
corruption you have today. Salaries are not paid, the working facilities are not provided and quite a number of the media owners are politicians, some of them are contractors, so they influence what you write, they dictate and they could frustrate you like in a situation where journalists are transferred to very remote parts of the country because they were not willing to toe the line of their proprietors. So if you take a look at that aspect under this dispensation I wouldn't say there is press freedom.

But we haven't performed too badly either but there is still a lot of room for improvement. The improvement of course lies in, first and foremost, the welfare of Nigerian journalists which must improve and if that is done, it is then we can now talk about ethics. Because you can't talk about ethics to a man that is hungry, you can't talk about ethics to a man who has not received his salaries, who has not paid his house rents and you are asking him not to accept a bribe? Of course he is going to compromise in spite of whatever is called ethics and is going to get his job done for the man who is paying. So if you look at it from this point of view, under this dispensation, there is a very high level of corruption now.

**What are the essential aspects of the Journalists Welfare Bill and how was it drafted?**

We have prepared the Bill. It was drafted by a consultant to the National Assembly, a lawyer, Professor Osieke. Essentially we are looking at the areas that have to do with the welfare of journalists. We have in the Bill, a proposal that there is the need for an Act of the National Assembly to make it mandatory for media owners to appoint only professionals to manage and run media houses. For instance, presently newspapers proprietors appoint anybody as Editor of their papers. What we are advocating is that for anybody to be appointed as editor, he must have served a minimum of ten years in journalism before he can be appointed an editor. Because you can't be an editor without being a journalist in the first place.

Secondly, we are also advocating that the laws in our statute books as they affect the ownership of media organizations must change. Some people have argued that it may run contrary to the provisions of the Constitution. (We are advocating that) before anybody can go ahead to set up a media house, you must have what we are regarding as Security Deposit. When salaries are not paid, there must be something for journalists to fall back on.

I will give you a very good example about what happened in Ibadan about three months ago; Sketch newspaper was shut down. There are journalists that have served for 15 years, they were asked to go home with no kobo and with the backlog of about two years salaries unpaid. These are people who have put in their lives into journalism and you are asking them to go home without salaries, without any benefits; these are people who are married with children. If that happened in Sketch, an average journalist elsewhere will think of what has happened in Sketch and the risk that he is facing. So what we are advocating is that there must be security deposit for anybody that is going to set up any media organization and it is going to be in categories. We believe that with that, if salaries are not paid for may be after three months, according to the draft, we go to the bank, withdraw the money, pay our colleagues and declare that organisation bankrupt and it will be shut down.

**Do you have any specific amount in mind?**

Of course they are in categories. If you are setting up a medium for instance either radio, television or local newspaper what we are asking you to pay as Security Deposit is different from what you pay if you are setting up a national daily. Let me mention a newspaper to you; when National Interest started, many of our colleagues from reputable media houses resigned from their organizations to join National Interest. Today National Interest owes eight months salaries and these are people with families and you are asking them not to be corrupt? These are very fundamental problems and I believe that the values of our society should not differ, what is happening in Nigeria will not happen elsewhere so the laws in Nigeria must be different from what is obtainable in the U.S.
To what extent do you see the problem of economic downturn as being responsible for this distress?

It is not really a problem of the worker, if you employ somebody you have the responsibility to pay his wages. And if they say that is responsible, if the economy is bad, who are the owners of the media? They are the economic giants in the society, they are opinion leaders, the politicians, members of the National Assembly, the people who formulate policies for the country. MBI (Minaj Broadcasting International) is owing how many months salaries unpaid? AIT (Africa Independent Television) is owing. Who are these people, who are their friends, who are their associates, are they not members of the ruling class?

I had a discussion with the NPAN President, Ray Ekpu, who claimed that you once approached him and talked about setting an industry base wage for journalists and general improvement in wages. He said that he liked the idea and asked NUJ to come up with a proposal on which a discussion can be initiated but that NUJ did not forward one. Why didn't the NUJ do it? Secondly, is it possible and do you have a proposal on how this can be done?

You see, it is equally part of what we are proposing in the Bill that we are taking to the National Assembly. For instance, we believe that even private sector must have pension and gratuities for those who have served them for years. In quite a number of organizations including even Newswatch (magazine) I doubt if they even have a condition of service. We are advocating that there must be a condition of service in every media organization in Nigeria. It is part of what we are taking to the National Assembly. You see, first thing first, Ray Ekpu is a journalist, one of us, but today he is a businessman in the NPAN. We are not saying he is not one of us but of course when dealing with Ray Ekpu we equally have it at the back of our mind that he is no longer the same Ray Ekpu he used to be because today he is the President of NPAN. So I will not say Ray Ekpu will fight for my members more than I will fight for them. So whatever Ray Ekpu is saying, he is saying it as President of NPAN while I speak as President of NUJ.

Of course it is true we had a discussion but by the time he became President of the NPAN, we said look, lets watch Ray Ekpu …so it is better for us to take some of the issues agitating our minds to the National Assembly. Because you see, it pays the Nigerian society if we have a virile press, it pays the Nigerian society if we have a press that is free of corruption or to a large extent where corruption is minimized. First and foremost, the average Nigerian benefits.

So the goals are beyond just the journalists themselves, we are talking about national stability and for this country to prosper politically and economically the press must be free of corruption to a large extent and the only way it can be free of corruption based on my experience in other countries that I have visited, I know that journalists elsewhere cannot easily be compromised because at least essentially they know the media people and they know they will meet their basic needs. There are instances where senior journalists look for only N2,000.00 (Two Thousand Naira) …I know how much we give out at the National Secretariat, so we cannot allow the situation to continue. And the only way to do it is not to blow too much grammar (engage in rhetoric’s), to allow the National Assembly to know that if you neglect the press, its like you neglect the Nigerian Army.

What do you have to say to allegations that you used the National Media Tour organised by NUJ in collaboration with the Ministry of Information to scout for contracts? Governor Haruna Boni of Adamawa is one of your accusers.

Let me start with Boni. I may not go into details. It took Boni six months after the exercise before he realised that we asked for contract which is not true. Like I said in the course of the first interview I granted on this issue that blackmail and propaganda are the tools of politicians. The truth is that as a leader of the union, and with that kind of a project of course false accusations will land on my head. But I am convinced in what we have done. I have no
guilty conscience and I believe that every leader would be accountable to God even before his followers. So I am very much convinced in what we have done. That is that.

Now let me say this that during the media tour, we went round this country, you will recall that before the media tour there was this belief that nothing was happening. In fact some Nigerians were beginning to call for the military government, including some of our colleagues. Until we started the tour, we had the impression that nothing had been achieved. And again, it is part of our own responsibility. The press has a dual responsibility, we have our professional responsibility and we have a social responsibility to the Nigerian nation. And more so we have the backing of the Constitution; Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria empowers the press to monitor governance and ensure accountability.

So what we have done is to move round and see what they have done. And I am now convinced from our assessment that the least in our assessment performed far better than the best military government that ever ruled this country. There is no part of this country that you will visit now that you will not see appreciable level of development. Until we went out we didn't appreciate those things. I didn't appreciate it as an individual until we went on the tour. When we moved round, I now discovered that there were a lot of things being done across this country. In fact there are some governors that didn't perform well that had bought newspaper adverts to give an impression that they were performing excellently well. We got there we saw nothing. And don't forget that the assessment was not done by Smart Adeyemi. It was done by about 80 journalists, senior Journalists.

I put it to you; is it possible for me to influence my senior reporters? Is it possible for me to tell them to assess somebody that has not performed well? Is it possible? Can you, as a reporter, tell your colleague what he should write? And don't forget that a good number of those that participated in the media tour are today editors of their newspapers. I can name three or four who were involved who are now editors. In my estimation many senior journalists participated in the media tour. Irrespective of whatever anybody would say, of course Nigerians do not want change, Nigerians do not want anything that would expose them, those of them who tried to bribe us and we didn't take they resorted to blackmail.

Have you ever read or heard any of my colleagues that participated in that tour accusing me of corruption? Of course they wouldn't do that because they saw all that happened.

**What is NUJ's position on the ban on Beat Associations?**

Well, Ray Ekpu is the President of NPAN, he is also a journalist.... and I believe that they took quite a number of issues and things into consideration in asking the Beat Associations to go. But we met and have discussed and we are still discussing and by the time we meet at the stakeholders' conference we hope to take a critical look at that decision.

**Does that mean that the NUJ does not as at now agree with the NPAN on this issue?**

We have our reservation.

**Is NAWOJ part of the Associations that should go?**

Well that is what the NPAN said and the (Nigerian) Guild of Editors.

**Is it supposed to be a Beat Association?**

Well, that was what they said.

**The NUJ set up NAWOJ so where does the conflict come from? Or was it that the NPAN did not contact the NUJ before taking the decision?**

Yes, they didn't inform us even though we were aware that they were about to meet and they had that issue on the agenda. But like I said, we are being constrained because Ray Ekpu is a journalist and in the National Registration exercise that is on, Ray Ekpu is registered. In essence, he identifies with us and he is one of us. But that is not to say we are not going to
discuss, we are discussing. We met yesterday and we discussed the issue, we are going to meet again next week.

**What do you have to say to the case of a Daily Times staff who has been asked to resign because of her membership of the Catholic Media Practitioner which management regards as a Beat Association?**

Well I am not aware of the case you are talking about. I am just hearing it for the first time. When there is a formal report then we look at it and investigate. It may not be exactly what you are telling me.

**What do you think journalism would look like during the forth-coming year 2003 election? Can you also project on what the Nigerian Media would look like in the next five years?**

I foresee a very rough period ahead (during the election) except certain steps are taken now. I foresee a situation where many journalists may be killed in Nigeria. I was somewhere discussing with my colleagues and I said to them 'if you allow politicians to buy you, if you allow them to corrupt you and you dance to their tune, don't forget that the man that is asking you to carry a particular report has opponents and those opponents may not forgive you'. But again what I have kept on saying is that all these things are because of the high level of poverty and corruption in the media. So if you are talking about the future of the press, it is very bleak except we fight corruption now, it is a terrible problem. It is like a cancer now in the media, there is a high level of corruption and you are not going to blame people because they want a good future for themselves. Quite a number of journalists that practise today are not better (economically) than others in other professions. Other professionals are doing better because the economy favours them. And journalists begin to ask the question: "Is it a sin to have read journalism or mass communication?" Because they (journalists) can see their colleagues who probably they graduated the same year, from the same university or who were even their junior living better lives, driving the best of cars. So there are a lot of problems with the Nigerian Society, our society is faulty. It is a society where merit and hard work are not really appreciated. So in that kind of society we face what we are facing, and that is why there is corruption in every life of Nigeria. And until when we fight corruption in Nigeria, even Nigeria as a nation, her future is bleak because of corruption. There is corruption in high places in this country and once there is corruption don't talk about future.

**Besides the Bill what other practical steps are the NUJ taking to tame this corruption in the media so that we can avert this bleak future?**

We have now determined that the Press Council should be inaugurated. The NUJ, the NPAN and the NGE met yesterday, we met the Minister (of Information) informally and agreed that in the next few weeks we must meet and rectify whatever the disagreement in the course of the passing of the Bill so that we can smoothen the Bill and get it inaugurated. So that people can face disciplinary measures if they are found guilty of professional misconduct. Because I know that the greatest problem confronting Nigeria, even the press today is corruption. There are so many stories that when I read, I feel bad, because when you look at it the basic elementary knowledge of journalism teaches you that you balance a report; they are not balanced, facts are misplaced. Look at the junks, look at what they are doing in Lagos. If you buy any evening newspaper in Lagos you will cry for Nigeria. There is a limit to freedom. You don't say because there is press freedom in Nigeria you now write what is not true and you now say that is freedom. Freedom does not condone lies and falsehood. Freedom is based on facts. I believe we have a lot of problems and the major one is to fight corruption first and minimize corruption.
Compaore, Eyadema, Other African Heads of States in RFS’s List of Predators of the Press

Paris-based international press freedom organisation, Reporters Sans Frontiers (RFS) recently released a report detailing a list of 27 heads of states, organisations and individuals who routinely violated press freedom during the year ended 2001. Twelve of the perpetrators are Africans.

RFS says the individuals either violated press freedom themselves and or had others do the deed. They might be president, cabinet minister, army chief, Guide of the Revolution or leader of an armed group. All have the power to jail, kidnap, torture and even kill journalists. Because they have faces, we should learn to recognise these predators and to denounce them.

The 12 African heads of states among the 27-member inglorious club of journalists’ predators are listed below. The list is not presented in order of severity of repression visited on the media by the individuals, but alphabetically by country.

Angola: Dos Santos
A pragmatic Marxist active in the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) since he was a teenager, the Soviet-trained engineer became independent Angola's second president in 1979 when he was 37. The civil war, pitting the MPLA against Jonas Savimbi's UNITA since independence, has drained away most of the country's economic resources. The war also gives the regime a handy excuse for the lack of any real democracy and for its total control over information.

The authoritarian Dos Santos, who is feared within his own party, doesn't take kindly to criticism, as independent journalist Rafael Marques found out in July 1999, when he wrote an article saying the president was partly responsible for the country's ruin. He was held for more than a month later that year, an MPLA member of parliament threatened to kill him and he was then given a six-month suspended prison sentence.

Burkina Faso: François Compaoré
Since 1989 he has officially been "an economic affairs adviser" to his older brother Blaise, the president since 1987. On 13 December 1998, Norbert Zongo, publisher of the weekly L'Indépendant, died along with three friends, apparently when their vehicle burned. But they had been shot dead before the fire. Zongo was investigating the murder of David Ouedraogo, François Compaoré's driver.

In December 1997, after a large sum of money was stolen from François' home, presidential guards seized and tortured four employees suspected of the theft, including Ouedraogo, who died from his wounds. Zongo had several times denounced in his paper the suspected role of François in the murder. On 17 January 2001, François was questioned by the judge investigating Zongo's death. In February, a top presidential guard officer was charged with murder. François Compaore is clearly involved in the trial of Zongo's killers.

DCR: Joseph Kabila
Democratic Republic of Congo’s Joseph Kabila, is thin and reserved. The 32-year-old major-general seems the exact opposite of his father Laurent, who was assassinated on 16 January 2001 in Kinshasa. Brought up in Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda, the new president has commanded the country's army since September 1999.

When he was sworn in, he spoke in favour of human rights and democracy and toured western capitals where these subjects were discussed. But nothing was done and, with national mourning over, attacks on press freedom have actually increased.

The young head of state does not control the various security forces, which remain the major threat to the press. Since 1997, more than 130 journalists have been arrested by one of the country's nine security forces and many have been tortured. Deep-rooted old habits are not so easy to change.
Equatorial Guinea: Teodoro Obiang Nguema
Teodoro Obiang Nguema, overthrew his uncle Francisco Macias Nguema in 1979 and has run the former Spanish colony with an iron hand ever since. He was "re-elected" president in 1996 with more than 99 per cent of the vote in elections boycotted by the opposition. Democracy is only theoretical and human rights violations are very common.

A soldier by profession, he is not used to being contradicted. The state-controlled press, radio and television are under the thumb of his party. The few independent newspapers keep their circulation figures quiet, so the regime considers them dangerous. Journalists are arrested, interrogated and threatened and non-official publications are intimidated through financial pressure. The foreign press is rarely seen.

Eritrea: Issaias Afeworki
Born in 1945 to a Christian family in Asmara, Eritrea, he studied engineering in Addis Ababa before joining the Popular Front for the Liberation of Eritrea, which was fighting for the country's independence. He became leader of the Front in 1974 and Eritrea's first president in 1993.

Often accused of autocratic tendencies, he only recently showed himself to be a "predator of press freedom." On 18 September 2001, the government banned all privately-owned media "until further notice." At least eight journalists were arrested over the next few days and at least two fled the country. The reason for the arrests is not known and the state media have not mentioned them. Eritrea is the only African country that no longer has any privately-owned media.

Ethiopia: Meles Zenawi
He seized power in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1991 with the help of Eritrean rebels after 20 years in the bush as a guerrilla with the Tigre Marxist rebels, whose information and propaganda operation he ran. He turned his back on communism in 1990, but as prime minister he has not liberalised the country. Genuine democracy and media diversity do not seem among his priorities. In fact, he has a special aversion to independent media.

In 1996 he called the country's handful of authorised newspapers the "gutter press." He also does not like jokes. He has sued dozens of journalists for libel and twice in 1996 journalists were jailed because their papers printed unflattering cartoons of him. Three others spent four years in prison in the capital before being released for "lack of evidence".

Lybia: Moammar Gaddafi
He is now the longest-serving leader in the Arab world. After he seized power in 1969, the colonel established an authoritarian regime. In August 2000, after Libyan intervention in the hostage-taking incident in the Philippines island of Jolo, Libya welcomed journalists from around the world and Gaddafi sought to present himself as a great defender of humanitarian causes.

But at home, he still does not allow a free media. The four official newspapers, along with the television and radio, carry only the regime's propaganda. No criticism of Gaddafi is permitted. Visas are rarely granted to foreign journalists. Abdullah Ali al-Sanussi al-Darrat, in prison since 1973, is the longest-held journalist in the world. It is not known where he is held or what his health is like. Many suspect he has died in jail.

Rwanda: Paul Kagame
In July 1994, he and his Rwandan Patriotic Front guerrillas ended the Rwandan genocide by seizing power in Kigali. In April 2000, he was elected president. At 45, Kagame's tall, austere, but courteous appearance hides an inflexible temperament that does not accept much criticism. Internal opposition is muzzled and opponents are even targeted in exile, where several have been murdered or received death threats. At least eight journalists are still being held without trial, including Dominique Makeli, who has been in prison in Kigali since September 1994. In December 2001, the managing editor of one publication spent several days in jail after giving space to the banned political party of former President Pasteur Bizimungu.
Swaziland: Mswati III
Now 33, he has ruled Swaziland, Africa's last absolute monarchy, since 1986. His father banned political parties and in 1973 replaced the constitution by a "royal proclamation." In line with this tradition, Mswati III shows little enthusiasm for sharing power despite recent strikes and demonstrations calling for a multi-party democracy.

Freedom of expression is severely limited. Criticism of the monarch is forbidden and censorship is routine. In 2001, two privately-owned publications, The Nation and The Guardian, were banned twice in one month. In June 2001, the king issued a decree allowing him to ban any publication without explanation or legal procedure. When the United States threatened to suspend aid, the king revoked part of the controversial decree but did not say which clauses remained in force.

Tunisia: Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali
He took over from the ailing Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia in 1987 and in the last decade, with support from a 130,000-strong police force, has muzzled all dissenting voices. Both the privately-owned and the official media have the same tone since all criticism of the regime is unofficially banned.

Two pro-Fundamentalist journalists, Hamadi Jebali and Abdullah Zuari, have been in prison since 1991. Others, such as Tewfik ben Brik, are constantly harassed. Sihem Bensedrine, who founded an online monthly magazine, Kalima, was jailed for six weeks in 2001, accused of disseminating "false news intended to disturb public order" after comments she made on the London-based Al Mustaqila TV station. The authorities also keep a very close eye on the Internet, blocking access to sites and intercepting e-mail.

Togo: Gnassingbé Eyadéma
The 63-year-old general has run Togo with an iron hand for nearly 40 years and is the longest-serving president in Africa. Born to a peasant family in Pya, in the north of the country, he joined the French army as soon as he was old enough. After returning to Togo, he and 30 other soldiers seized power on 13 January 1963 by attacking the home of President Sylvanus Olympio, killing him. Eyadema officially became president in 1967.

A quiet man, he rarely says what he thinks about his country's media. But many journalists have suffered his wrath. In the past six years, 21 journalists have been arrested and several jailed for libel or "insulting the head of state." Police have also seized tens of thousands of copies of opposition newspapers.

Journalist Jusuf Ruzimuradov, jailed for eight years in August 1999 for "belonging to an illegal organisation" and "insulting" the president in the media, is still in jail and is thought to have been tortured. Threats of rape against members of his family, maltreatment and psychological pressure are believed to have been used to extract confessions from him.

Zimbabwe: Robert Mugabe
In power for more than 20 years, the Zimbabwean is now strongly challenged inside the country. As part of his bloody struggle with white farmers, he is targeting independent journalists and foreign reporters. In 2001, Zimbabwe became the African country with the worst press freedom situation. Twenty local journalists were arrested and three foreign correspondents deported.

Mugabe and his government make constant sensational statements against the press, which they regularly accuse of "spying" or "terrorism." Yet the former schoolteacher, who has six university degrees, was hailed as a liberator when he won the 1980 presidential elections which ended white minority rule. Today he charges that the privately-owned local press only tells "lies" and that foreign media are out to "destabilise" the country.
Media Rights Monitor is published monthly by the Media Rights Agenda (MRA), an independent, non-governmental organisation established for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria. MRA is registered under Nigerian law and has Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

Media Rights Agenda (MRA) is an independent, non-governmental organisation established in August 1993 for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria. MRA is registered in Nigeria, and has Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights in Banjul, The Gambia. The Aims and Objectives of Media Rights Agenda are:

- to promote respect and recognition for press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria;
- to provide protection and support for journalists and writers engaged in the lawful pursuit of their professional duties;
- to promote the highest standards of professional ethics, integrity, training and conduct in the journalism profession; and
- to bring about a conducive social and legal atmosphere for the practice of journalism, and ensure the protection of the journalist’s right not to be compelled to work against his or her conviction or disclose confidential sources of information.

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Editorial: Making GSM Truly Affordable

For some weeks now, the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of the National Assembly and the two private Global System for Mobile (GSM) telecommunications providers, ECONET and MTN, have been at daggers drawn. The bone of contention is the tariffs and services of the GSM providers. Many members of the House hold the view that the tariffs are too high and exploitative. The GSM providers on the other hand argued that the high cost of deploying facilities and keeping them running is responsible for the present tariff structure. They also contend that the prevailing environment under which they operate, the regime of fees they are made to pay to the regulatory authority, the Nigerian Telecommunications Commission (NCC) and interconnectivity problems with NITEL, do not give them the latitude to be as flexible as requested by the House. They point also to the “high” cost of licences which they paid.

To have the facts and figures on the matter, the House set up an ad-hoc committee to investigate the GSM providers' operation.

At the end of the probe, the committee submitted a report accusing the GSM providers of defrauding Nigerian GSM user of over N12 billion through the per-minute billing system employed by the operators. According to the ad-hoc committee's report, its findings indicate that subscribers lose a third of the call time guaranteed by their respective refill cards due to the arbitrariness of their billing system.

Consequently, the committee said every subscriber loses an average of N500 in the case of MTN and N300 to ECONET for every refill card purchased, adding that "when these base figure are applied to the declared profits as published by MTN recently, the company would be seen to have defrauded subscribers in Nigeria to the tune of about N6billion".

Furthermore, the committee chaired by Rep Tony Anyanwu observed that since the GSM operators have defrauded subscribers for services not rendered, the House should order the operators to credit their subscribers with substantial refund in excess of N12billion.

The report asked the Communications Ministry and the NCC to suspend all incentive and rebates granted to MTN and ECONET until they slash tariff to an affordable rate together with per-second billing system. It further recommended a tariff of N10 per minute call charge
for local calls and N45 per minute for international calls, as well as a validity period of one year for access cards.

Despite these findings, the GSM providers still insist on a continuation of the status quo. Media Rights Agenda finds this particularly disturbing. This is more so because the GSM providers appear determine to recoup their investment in just a couple of months of operation. They appear to have forgotten that their licences covers an initial five-year period and it therefore makes no economic or moral sense to expect to reap all their investment in such a hurry as they are apparently trying to do now.

Although in the opinion of Media Rights Agenda the request by the House that the tariff be pegged at N10 is not very logical on the short-run, it nonetheless believe that there is a compelling need for the GSM operators to reduce their tariffs substantially. Both parties, therefore, need to have the courage to sit down to negotiate an acceptable tariff which will enable numerous willing Nigerians access their freedom of expression through the medium of telecommunication.

Letters

Add Me On Your Mailing List

I hereby apply to be put on the list of those enjoying the informative and highly educative journal, Media Rights Monitor.

I am a principal Assistant Registrar (Information and Public relations) at the University of Ado-Ekiti. I am impressed by the editions of the journal that I read in Lagos at the home of one of my friends.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated kind consideration.

Ajibade Olubunmi
ajibjoebunmi@yahoo.com
University of Ado-Ekiti
Ekiti State

Editor’s Comment

Dear Mr. Olubunmi,

Thank you very much for your mail and the kind words regarding the usefulness of Media Rights Monitor. Indeed, it would be our pleasure to include you on our mailing list and supply you regularly. Unfortunately, we shall not be able to satisfy you and many others like you who have written and phoned in requesting to be put on the mailing list. We are presently constrained by the high cost of production and distribution including postage, which have witnessed astronomical increases in the last couple of months.

We are working on a process of getting subscribers to pay a minimum rate for the publication in order that we will be able to continue to publish the journal and various other publications from our stable which at the moment we give free of charge. We shall keep you posted of the progress in this regard.

Once again, thank you for the interest and kind words.

FOI Stakeholders Re-focus for Better Impact

Efforts at ensuring the enactment of a freedom of information law intensified in June with the conference of the Freedom of Information Coalition held in Abuja. Media Rights Agenda organized the conference, which held at Dayspring Hotel between 25th and 27th, with the support of the International Human Rights Law Group (IHRLG).
The Freedom of Information Coalition Conference was devoted to reviewing advocacy efforts on the FOI Bill. The Conference, attended by coalition members from Lagos, Kaduna, Zaria, Sokoto, Kano and Abuja, was concerned that the FOI Bill has still not been passed despite the fact that it was gazetted as far back as August 1999 and had undergone the first and second readings in the House of Representatives.

Participants at the conference expressed worry that less than ten months to the end of the four-year tenure of the National Assembly and the Executive in the 4th Republic, the anti-corruption efforts of the government have borne little fruit. Part of the reason for this, participants noted, has been the inability of the National Assembly to pass complementary bills that would make the Anti-Corruption Act effective. These are the Whistle Blower and the Freedom of Information Bills.

The conference also noted that the House of representatives has failed to pass the bill in spite of the fact that a Public Hearing on the Bill was also held nine months ago in October 2001, at which the importance of the Bill as a mechanism for promoting openness, transparency, accountability and popular participation in governance was re-emphasised. The conference also noted that the culture of secrecy in Nigeria’s public service has encouraged the deepening of public corruption and lack of accountability.

Participants therefore re-affirmed their belief that the promotion of open governance and accountability in the Nigerian society is contingent upon the passage of the FOI Bill.

In a presentation to the stakeholders Maxwell Kadiri of Media Rights Agenda, traced the history of the Bill. According to him, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) presented the Bill before the House of Representatives in the third quarter of 1999. It was sponsored by Honourables Jerry Ugokwe, Tony Anyanwu and Nduka Irabor. Apart from the three core-sponsors, about 23 other legislators signified their support and were, according to official documentation, co-sponsors of the bill.

Mr. Kadiri said the first reading of the Bill was held on February 22, 2000 and the second reading came up for hearing about a month later, March 13, 2000. He said the Bill was subsequently sent to the House Committee on Information then headed by Hon. Uche Maduako for review before presentation for the third reading which was expected to culminate in its passage.

In continuation of the efforts to ensure the passage of the Bill, Mr. Kadiri said MRA embarked on a series of lobbying and visitations to members of the National Assembly. In addition, MRA organized a cocktail for about 250 members of the lower chamber to provide an informal atmosphere for MRA personnel to further enlighten them on the merit of the Bill. It also organized seminars and roundtable discussion as well as advocacy visits to some parts of the country to create awareness and sensitise stakeholders and the general public on the importance of the bill.

During the tenure of Maduako, Mr. Kadiri said the FOI Bill received accelerated attention in the lower chamber of the Federal House of Assembly. As a way of ensuring a perfect presentation at the third reading, the Maduako-led committee undertook a fact-finding trip to the United Kingdom and United States of America (USA). Their mission was to gather information and exchange ideas with relevant individuals and organizations on the processes for passage of such bill in those countries. The visit according to the Maduako-led committee was a useful exercise and was expected to help the committee in the presentation of the bill for a third and final reading in the House.

Mr. Kadiri explained that when the bill was finally presented for the third reading in May last year, the membership of the committee had changed. Hon. Chijioke Edoga, the new chairman, made the presentation. His presentation, however, engendered reservation from the members of the House prompting the report to be sent back to the committee. The members who at the second reading in 2000 had shared the view that the Bill was sufficiently clear and
did not require further input, changed their mind. They mandated the committee on the information to hold a public hearing on the Bill to fulfill one of the basic requirements and endear it to the public.

Mr. Kadiri recalled that the public hearing held on October 3 and 4, 2001. It attracted an impressive participation and contribution from members of the society from various works of life including the academia, labour, legal profession, civil right groups and journalists. Hon. Edoga and his team are yet to present the result of the public hearing to the House. With the recent changes in the leadership of many committees of the House, including the Committee on Information, fears have been expressed that the bill may yet suffer further delay. The expected new leadership and members of the committee will need time to understand the imperative of the bill.

The dissolution of the committee which was announced late June as the House went on recess automatically removes the responsibility of presenting the bill for a third and final reading from Hon. Edoga. That responsibility will be that of the new chairman of the committee on information.

According to Mr. Kadiri, the House sub-committee on information under the chairmanship of Hon. Ene Okon is in possession of consultants' report on the public hearing and proposed amendments which includes the consensus views expressed at the hearing. He informed that the committee had not considered the report as at May 2002.

*The Guardian* in a recent report said it reliably learnt that Hon. Farouk Lawal, former chairman House Committee on Inter Parliamentary Union, might replace Hon. Edoga.

Mr. Kadiri described the delay in the passage of the bill as "one of the frustrating element of pushing for bills under democratic dispensation. We submitted the bill since 1999 and have done several programmes to promote its passage."

Mr. Kadiri said the dissolution of the committees may affect the passage of the Bill. He however expressed optimism that the constitution of a coalition to campaign for the passage of the Bill will enhance its fate. "The coalition will give further inputs not only to get the bill passed but also to sensitise the Nigerian society."

The participants subsequently set up an Advocacy and Media committees charged with the responsibilities of refocusing the coalition drive to ensure the enactment of the bill at the earliest possible time.

**Communiqué issued at the end of the FOI Stakeholders conference**

In a communiqué issued at the end of the FOI Stakeholder Conference, participants specifically observed that:
- The passage of the Freedom of Information Bill into Law has taken much longer time than initially anticipated;
- The Bill will gain wider acceptance if the public is made to understand that it will promote a more open society;
- A lot more advocacy needs to be done to get the legislature to pass the Freedom of Information Bill into law;
- The Coalition is ready to work with professional associations, business groups, Labour, student unions, religious groups and the political parties towards the passage of the bill; and that
- There is a renewed commitment by the Coalition in the pursuit of its advocacy efforts.

Participants also made the following resolutions:
- An Advocacy Committee be established to intensify efforts at the National Assembly, as well as a Media Committee to improve publicity and awareness nationwide
- There should be a partnership between the Freedom of Information Coalition, Zero Corruption Coalition, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and the Code of Conduct Bureau to hasten the passage of the Bill.
♦ A day be set aside as Freedom of Information/Open Society Day as part of the campaign efforts aimed at:
  a. Promoting the passage of the Bill
  b. Promoting a culture of open society in Nigeria
♦ The National Assembly has a historic responsibility to Nigerians to pass the Freedom of Information Bill within the life span of the present administration

Tive Denedo, Acting ED of Media Rights Agenda and General Ishola Williams (rtd)
Executive Director of Transparency In Nigeria, signed the communiqué.

Cash And Carry Political Reporting Looms As 2003 Elections Draw Nearer

A head of the political activities that will culminate in the 2003 general elections, the media have tightened the noose around the neck of politicians desirous of using their outlets to reach out to their supporters and prospective voters.

*SUNDAY TIMES* investigations revealed that the media have now adopted the policy of cash before service for the coverage of political activities involving either individual politicians or the parties they belong to.

The coverage of political news hitherto regarded as social service attracting no rates is also no longer free.

Electronic media organizations especially those owned by the Federal Government are the worst culprits in charging high rates for the coverage of political activities.

The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) charges discriminatory rates for its news coverage. According to the advert rate for the Lagos national station issued by the Marketing Manager, Ms. G. T. Akinola, for any organization in business to get a mention for two minutes in the commercial news bulletin of Radio Nigeria 1, it would pay N6,000 in addition to 50 per cent surcharge for coverage.

A two-minute mention of any organization in the commercial news bulletin of Radio Nigeria 3 attracts N8,000 while one-minute air time costs N4,000 with all charges attracting 50 per cent surcharge for coverage.

For politicians or parties to get a two-minutes mention in any of the news bulletin of either Radio Nigeria 1, Metro FM or Radio Nigeria 3, they have to part with N25,000 while a one-minute air time costs N12,500.

Akinola told the *SUNDAY TIMES* that politicians and parties are also to pay more for normal advertisements and jingles on Radio Nigeria stations.

According to her, politicians will now pay N7,250 for a 60 second spot advertisement on Radio Nigeria 1 as against N2,900 which was the usual rate. Also, a 60 second spot advertisement which normally costs N4,000 on Metro FM, she said, would now cost politicians N10,000 with five per cent value added tax.

She said the reason for special rates for political advertisement was because politicians have much money in their hands.

The situation is not different in Ray Power and Rhythm 93.7FM radio stations in Lagos, although the rates of both stations are less compared to those of government owned FRCN.

Rhythm 93.7FM radio, for instance, does not charge discriminatory fees for commercial and political news coverage. The station charges N25,000 for commercial or political news programmes for two minutes while its live broadcast for either commercial or political events attracts N70,000 per hour.
With Ray Power 1, however, the advert rates are discriminatory as the station charges N100,000 to cover a political news conference for one hour whereas for the same airtime, it charges N10,400 non-political news conference.

For political news coverage, Ray Power 2 charges N60,000 per hour and N10,400 for non-political events.

Non-political news promo with Ray Power attracts N7,935 per hour while politicians are required to pay N34,188 for the same air time.

A 60 second jingle on Ray Power costs N6,735.04 when it is not political and N9,240.00 for a political jingle.

With the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), it would be easy for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a politician to reach out to his teeming supporters and prospective voters through the acclaimed largest television network in the country.

Any politician seeking to feature on network programmes such as One on One and Political Spotlight is required to cough out N150,000 and N162,000 per hour respectively.

The advert rates of the African Independent Television (AIT) is much higher as a live appearance by any politician on the television station costs N170,000 for 10 minutes and N297,500 for 20 minutes.

A mid news political advert slot on AIT for 60 seconds attracts a rate of N157,250 plus five per cent Value Added Tax (VAT) while political advert slots for 45 seconds in mid news costs N146,030.

For 30 and 15 second mid news political advert slots, politicians will pay N98,282 and N78,625 respectively, minus five per cent VAT, although an official of the DAAR Communications Ltd, owner of AIT and Ray Power 1 and Ray Power 2 told SUNDAY TIMES that the advert rates for political messages would soon be reviewed upward.

In the print media category, political advert rates are also not the same as products rate or other commercials rate like public notice, announcements of AGMs and obituaries.

These newspapers include The Guardian and ThisDay. A full page product advert in The Guardian newspaper attracts N98,344 while the same space for public notice is N115,440 but a full page political advert attracts N133,000.

Also, while a half page product advert in The Guardian costs N59,830, public notice for the same space attracts a rate of N68,640 while a political advert for the same space costs N74,360.

This Day charges N105,000 for a full page product advert, N120,000 for public notice and N135,000 political advert for the same space.

A half page product advert in This Day costs N65,000; public notice attracts N72,000 while political advert costs N80,000.

Full page colour advert in The Guardian costs N145,000 while in ThisDay, it costs N155,000.

The print media do not charge any rate for covering news conference or political events unlike their counterparts in the electronic media.

The findings leave clear indication that for many political interest groups which do not have funds, access to the media will be almost impossible. This will therefore make the media a mouth piece of only those who are well funded thereby blocking the opportunity of many to effectively participate in the political process. This is similar to what obtained during the General Abubakar's political transition leading to the enthronement of the present government.

Media Rights Agenda in several reports issued on a media monitoring exercise it conducted at the time, noted that the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) dominated media projection far above the other two registered political parties - All Peoples’ Party (APP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD).

For instance, out of a total of 245 pages of advertisements in the print media monitored in the exercise, during the month of January 1999, the PDP accounted for 158 representing 64.5 per cent, APP, 63, representing 25.7 per cent, and AD, 23, representing 9.4 per cent.
The reports noted that the disparity in the media projection enjoyed by the political parties was directly proportional to the money spent on the media by them. This was not helped by the failure of INEC to offer a base assistance to the parties for a minimum media access.

Political analysts regret this development as they contend that the commercialization of the news media has made nonsense of the social responsibility role of the media in a democracy.

They also noted that since politicians are made to pay through their nose to contest for political offices, it would be difficult to prevent them on moral grounds from looting the nation's treasury when they ultimately get into office.

*Culled from SUNDAY TIMES newspaper of Nigeria of July 7, 2002 with inputs from Media Rights Monitor.

Five Journalists Die in Road Accidents

Five journalists lost their lives in two separate road accidents in Kaduna and Sokoto states. Two of the dead journalists were Musa Isa and Malam Nasir Sidi Liman, Chairman and Secretary respectively of the Kaduna State council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). The tragic loss of the two journalists occurred along the Abuja - Lokoja road on July 5.

According to officials of the Federal Road Safety Corp (FRSC) in Abuja, a yet to be identify person also died with the journalists. He was traveling in the same vehicle with them.

The two journalists were on their way to Oshogbo, Osun State for the National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of the NUJ. They have since been buried according to Muslim rites, while a condolence register was opened at the state secretariat of the NUJ.

Late Isa, who was working with the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Kaduna spent 18 years in journalism, while Malam Nasir who worked with the state radio practised journalist for 15 years.

In another incident, on July 7, three journalists lost their lives in a similar road accident which occurred along Tangaza-Gudu Road in Tangaza Local Government Area of Sokoto.

The deceased are; Ahmed Mohammed of State Newspaper Company Publishers of The Path, Yusuf Audu of the State Ministry of Information and Bello Suleiman Tangaza, a producer with the State Radio Station, Rima Radio Sokoto. They were on the entourage of the State Enlightenment Committee on the voters registration and National Identity card project when their vehicle somersaulted.

Despite Tempers And Tantrums, Stakeholders Agree on Draft Bill for a Review of Broadcasting Code

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), has had the final forum in its series intended to fashion out an agreeable document towards mobilizing stakeholders for a review of the NBC Code. The meeting which held in Minna, the Niger State capital, late July and lasted for three days witnessed intensive and combative debate by delegates representing public and private media organisations and media regulatory agencies.

The meeting also brought to the fore the extent to which many broadcast organisations have been violating broadcasting rules. It also marked a departure from previous attempts at reviewing media laws which have tended to exclude the operators from the formulation process.

According to the Director-General of NBC, Mallam Danladi Bako, in his opening remarks, the decision of the commission to involve stakeholders in the drawing of a code for the practice of broadcasting in the country was borne out of the fact that the Commission was
only responding to the spirit of democracy which guarantees popular participation. The Commission has also seen the merit of involving stakeholders in the process of law making.

"The laws establishing the Commission permits us to go ahead and establish a Code," Bako said in his opening remarks "It did not say we must speak with stakeholders or practitioners, but in the spirit of civilization, democracy and good governance, it is part of our responsibility to carry everybody along or rather and better still, to carry as many people as possible along."

He noted that although the Commission in collaboration with the National Assembly had done extensive comparative analysis of Broadcasting Codes of some other countries, but the new National Broadcasting Code must be "home grown in all entirety." He added that the review was necessary in the quest for protection of good family values as well as child rights for this and up-coming generations. He said the Code which is being reviewed has had the input of ministries and parastatals of government as well as those of private and public sectors. He said this was necessary to ensure that all interested members of the public as well as in the private sector made input into the new National Broadcasting Code.

At the end of the opening ceremony, the meeting broke into five groups. Each of the five groups deliberated on various aspects of the Code. These include Religious broadcasting, advertising and promotion, legal issues, the issue of networking as well as news and programmes.

Aspect of the Code that could not be handled at the group level were raised at the plenary section where final decisions were taken on such provisions.

Some sections particularly proved thorny and also emotive. For instance, the issue of religious programmes took a lot of time and energy to discuss. The issue dealt with in Section 4, subsection of 5 of the code had been couched thus: "Religious broadcasts promoting unverifiable claims are prohibited from broadcasting. The peculiar advantage of the broadcast media shall not be used to mislead public". The bone of contention was the word "unverifiable".

In the same vein, Section 4, subsection 7 says "Religious rites or rituals involving cruelty and obscenity shall be avoided except in programmes designed to specifically teach the beliefs or faiths of a religion." Some participants were of the view that the provision was not fair to Muslims. It was finally agreed that the same provision had made allowance that such could be used to teach the tenets of a religion.

Another provision that generated much controversy was the issue of networking. And at the vanguard of this were representatives of Daar Communications Limited, proprietors of Africa Independent Television, (AIT), Ray power FM 1 and Ray power FM2 radios. While it was obvious that the group wanted to network with little or no control, the NBC, through the Code, wanted a certain measure of regulation.

Section 2, subsection 5 of Licencing Procedure proposed that the "Commission shall licence all forms of networking". Those who wanted to network, mostly private broadcast operators, saw this as amounting to asking the station to seek a fresh licence besides the ones they are already holding. At the end of the day, it was agreed that the mode and spirit of any networking shall be subject to the ratification of the NBC. Those who understand the science of language knew it was another name of licencing.

Many participants obviously went to the meeting with two agenda; to secure their private interest as well the overall interest of the industry. But their approaches differed which was responsible for the tempers. Despite the many instances when tempers rose to the point of name-calling and even exchange of fisticuffs, the exercise was, however, very successful.

Private Telecom Providers Boost Nigeria's Telecom Services

Nigeria is set to overshoot the International Telecommunications Union (ITU)'s recommendation of one telephone line to 100 citizens. The development is as a result of
the unrelenting efforts of private telecommunications operators (PTOs). This achievement is set to be boosted by the licensing of more firms to operate Fixed Wireless Access Spectrum in all the states of the federation especially the rural areas by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC).

On May 2, Vice President Atiku Abubakar also excited telecom operators when he announced that government had reconsidered its decision to suspend the process of licensing the second national operator or the second telecom carrier until the completion of the privatization of NITEL. He said that government has "decided to go ahead with the licensing of the Second National Operator (SNO) in order not to lose momentum in view of the interest shown in this regard." The NCC will, in the not too distant future announce the new timetable for the process of licensing the SNO. At the completion of these processes, Nigeria would be competing and in all likelihood may beat the record of South Africa as one of the leading African countries in the provision of telecommunications services to its citizens.

In a related development, Eng. Ernest Nduke, Executive Vice-chairman of NCC promised that a substantial amount of the license fees realized from the auctioning of the FWA Spectrum licences would be ploughed into developing rural telecommunications and universal access communications programme. He added that the FWA spectrum licenses were auctioned in the regions "to ensure that broadband and Internet services are extended to all parts of the country."

The meeting of the ITU recommendation which had been restricted to the nation's metropolis like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Abuja, Kaduna, Kano, Ibadan etc would now be spread to all rural areas where there had been no telecommunications facilities at all.

The PTOs' efforts are also seen as liberalizing the freedom to communicate. This freedom to communicate constitutes one mode for the realization of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by most international treaties to which Nigeria is a signatory having ratified them. They include article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), as well as Chapter four, Section 39 of our own 1999 Constitution.

The present licenses granted to many firms to carry out telecommunications services would open up the economy and reduce drastically wastage of time, money and lives that have been lost and would have continued to be lost due to the lack or inadequacy of these services. It would also, among other things, ensure investment and lead to employment of a substantial number of hands in the nation's labour market.

Sequel to an advert by the NCC inviting applications for licenses to operate Fixed wireless Access Spectrum in any of the 36 states of the federation and Abuja, about 180 firms responded, bidding for licenses in the delineated territories. In 22 of the 37 territories, demand exceeded supply and NCC sold the licenses in these territories by auction to about two dozen firms in five separate auction bids, while in the rest 15 regions where the demand did not outstrip the supply, the licenses were sold at the reserve price. Nineteen of the two dozen firms paid up their licence fees at the prescribed date and have been given six months to deploy their services. Again, going by the claims of the two private GSM networks (MTN and ECONET Wireless), they have between them deployed close to 1 million GSM lines in the last ten years of their operations complementing those of NITEL's fixed and GSM lines as well as those of Fixed wireless and mobile lines provided by PTOs. Presently, Nigeria should have about 1.5 million functional telephone lines.

There are presently no less than ten PTOs spread in the nation's major metropolis with their own subscribers numbering well over 100,000 lines. Their services however do not support fax and data traffic yet. They are also not Internet capable.
Though, on May 20 NITEL failed to rollout its prepaid package which it calls "pay as you talk" which is the most popular GSM service in Nigeria, it took off with a limited number of contract post paid package. Rather than be the preferred network, it was a spoiler as subscribers to its limited lines were hit by interconnectivity problem with the two other private networks. Its subscribers could not call subscribers of MTN and ECONET and vice versa. Its connection with the two private networks rather than be unlimited was restricted to just 5,000 lines to each of the private networks at any point in time. In other words, no more than 5,000 connections are possible at any point in time between NITEL and each of the two private networks while interconnectivity is unlimited with private fixed wireless and analogue mobile telephone operators. There is also unlimited access between all the private networks.

The consequence is that telephone subscribers now cut across different strata of the society, both the rich and the poor, the employed and unemployed, the blue collar executives and the artisan and soon will reach the rural areas where the vast majority of the nation's population reside. With this, the nation's socio-political and economic life is set to move at a faster pace.

There is, however, a sore point which relates to the high cost of access of GSM services. Many Nigerians have continued to decry the high tariff. This has pitched the National Assembly against the GSM providers.

Nigeria Media Indicted Over Coverage Of HIV/Aids

The Nigerian media has come under reproach over its reports of HIV/AIDS by Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS), an NGO committed to propagating HIV/AIDS education. The organisation in a recent report of its media monitoring exercise on the coverage of HIV/AIDS in the print media in Nigeria during the month of March 2002, noted that media reports fell below expectations viewed against some major events within the month.

The exercise involved an analysis of media coverage of HIV/AIDS in selected national newspapers and magazines for frequency, accuracy and quality. The exercise began in March.

The exercise is expected to serve as a baseline to measure success of media intervention efforts, analyse trends of reporting and identify training needs.

According to the report issued by Omololu Falobi Project Director JAAIDS, in the month when former American President, Jimmy Carter and Bill Gates (Snr), father of Microsoft magnate, Bill Gates visited Nigeria on an awareness-raising tour, it would have been a surprise if HIV/AIDS issues had not been given prime attention by the print media.

The principle of personalities making news came to play in the cover treatment given to HIV/AIDS in the media during the duo's visit to the country, early in the month of March. During the visit, coverage of HIV/AIDS issues moved momentarily from inside pages where they are usually consigned to the front pages.

Stories relating to the visit made the front page of three newspapers. Three photographs relating to the visit also appeared in the press, two on the cover page and one on the back page. However, the report concluded that coverage of the visit could still be considered poor. For instance, one of the highlights of the visit was a presidential forum on HIV/AIDS that had President Olusegun Obasanjo as well as governors of some of Nigeria's 36 states and other top political leaders in attendance.

Surprisingly, coverage of that particular event received scant treatment in the print media. Coverage was limited to brief, 2-paragraph mentions in one or two newspapers without any details supplied on the issues discussed at the forum. It would appear that organisers of the presidential forum did not consciously engage the media for coverage of the event.
Eleven nationally-circulated daily newspapers were monitored during the exercise. In all, the newspapers published 101 stories during the month. These included 66 news stories, 24 feature articles, 10 opinion articles/interviews and one editorial.

While the total number of stories published suggest that every paper had at least one news item per day during the month, the reality, however, is that coverage was concentrated on particular days. Most of the publications appeared on the health pages of the newspapers. In papers such as Post Express and National Interest, both of which published a four-page weekly health pullout, up to two of the pages are devoted to HIV/AIDS.

If what is published on health pages is anything to go by, the report noted that HIV/AIDS definitely had more news coverage than other health issues. In the National Interest newspaper of March 7 for instance, out of the four pages on health, up to two pages carried HIV/AIDS-related stories. The Guardian's science and health page of March 14 also reflected the trend in favour of HIV/AIDS with two out of five stories published on the page focusing on the epidemic.

It was noticed that most of the items published as feature-length articles were not products of reporters' individual initiative, but usually a rehash of news items earlier published and culled stories from news agencies or foreign publications.

One major event in the period under review that should have merited more coverage than it got was a seminar on HIV/AIDS in the Nigerian military which held in Abuja during the month. Unfortunately, the event did not get adequate news mention. Only the Daily Times, Vanguard and ThisDay had news reports on the conference. It was a conference that should have been given better coverage owing to the security implications of an HIV epidemic among the nation's armed forces. The poor coverage can be attributed to poor engagement of the media by the organisers.

The report also indicted newspaper correspondents (reporters based outside the headquarters of their media organisations). It says the correspondents often do not give detailed coverage to special events like conferences and meetings because they often have competing assignments. The report observed that correspondents usually limit their participation at such events to the opening ceremonies, where they expect invited dignitaries to make newsworthy statements. This situation explains why many HIV/AIDS news emanating from Abuja, Nigeria's federal capital, get poor coverage in the print media, since most national newspapers have their offices and printing press in Lagos.

To overcome this problem, the report suggested that events organisers could consider sponsorship of health reporters (usually based in Lagos) to attend these events or conscious engagement of prominent media-based HIV/AIDS organisations to provide coverage.

The report says during the period of March under review, there were a total of 101 HIV/AIDS-related stories reported. Of these, 42 were on awareness, 25 on prevention, 22 on treatment and 12 on advocacy. Awareness for example refers to stories that focus on activities and pronouncements providing information on the virus for the readers.

The report noted that although much as awareness, prevention and treatment are important in the campaign against AIDS, what the findings of the monitoring exercise indicate is the need for more advocacy on the rights of People Living with AIDS (PLWA). It urged PLWA groups and people and organisations working to confront the stigma to speak up so that the media can help in putting an end to HIV-related stigma.

The report observed that some stories in the media addressed the stigma issue. National Interest of March 27 for example had a full page report on access to justice for women titled Women vs HIV/AIDS: The right and access to justice. This article written by Jones Idikio, a legal practitioner, was obviously a paper presented at an earlier workshop, a fact not stated in the publication. After a review of various related cases in other countries, the writer argues that PLWA in Nigeria are still capable of exercising their rights whenever they are discriminated against.
On March 21, The Guardian carried an editorial, the only one in the period under review, titled The HIV/AIDS Campaign. The editorial reviewed the progress recorded so far in the campaign from the period of people hiding behind figures and denying existence of the virus, to now when many are publicly admitting being infected. It called for enlightenment programmes to warn citizens against dangers of unprotected casual sex, prostitution and indiscriminate use of unscreened blood. "Strengthening the health system and protecting people against a broad range of opportunistic diseases should be considered a major step in contacting (sic) the HIV/AIDS pandemic", the paper stated.

The report said the editorial was very timely and commended the newspaper, “the country's most prestigious national daily” for deeming it necessary to write on the issue and remind the government and the public on what should be done to sustain the battle against the epidemic. Unlike opinion articles, editorials carry a lot of weight and influence as they are indications of the media organisation's informed opinions and are judged as major planks of public opinion.

On the goal of the monitoring exercise to determine the quality of the content of the HIV/AIDS coverage in the media, the report noted that during the month under review, there were indications that while the rules guiding the appropriate use of language in HIV/AIDS reporting were observed in many of the reports, there were still cases of violations. Lack of attribution of the sources of some stories and poor identification of some of the contributing writers were other lapses noticed in the media reports.

For example, in the National Interest of March 27, a story titled HIV/AIDS: A scourge and its many controversies,' was replete with stigmatizing language that should have been removed or corrected before publishing, especially since the writer was obviously not a staff of the organization. Among such language occurring in the piece are words and phrases such as ‘deadly disease’, 'scourge' and ‘victims’.

It advised that writers should generally avoid using alarming and descriptive language. In place of those words and phrases it recommended words such as ‘disease’, 'epidemic' or 'pandemic' and ‘people living with HIV/AIDS’.

The report said unlike in the past when sensationalism of HIV stories was very common in the media, the monitoring for the month of March had only few cases of sensationalism. One such case was a story in the Sunday Champion of March 23 titled HIV victim to lose arm. The sub-editor who cast the headline apparently sought to capitalize on the unverified claim of the accused, found guilty of stealing under the Sharia law, that he was HIV-positive. But for the desire to sensationalize the story, it would have sufficed to title the story Another Sharia victim to lose arm. Even if the accused was actually a person living with HIV, calling him a victim is another case of stigmatization which discourages people living with HIV from openly coming to terms with their status.

The Sunday Tribune of March 24 had another equally disturbing story titled Animal shares HIV/AIDS drug with human beings. The headline of the story, published in the gossip column of the paper, is clearly misleading since what the writer intended was to criticize an unproven allegation that anti-retroviral drugs being imported into the country had not undergone human trials.

According to the four-paragraph report, the drug(s) believed to have been imported from India at the cost of $4 million were only tested on rats. Instead of tucking this sensitive story in a gossip column, the writer would have acted more responsibly by properly investigating the story before raising the alarm. If the story turns out to be baseless (and the story did not offer any evidence to prove its allegation), Sunday Tribune may have succeeded in publishing rumour as fact, and spreading an untruth.

Once in a while, there is a noticeable drought in HIV/AIDS stories. For about four days in the month (March 18, 19, 25 and 30), all the newspapers had not a single HIV-related story.
Appropriate use of illustrative pictures seems to be a major problem with most of the newspapers. Many feature-length stories and were not accompanied by illustrative pictures. The report said this is a challenge to communications staff of NGOs, government agencies etc, to supply the media with good and appropriate pictures to accompany coverage of HIV-related activities.

The report made a case for the use of cartoons to pass across HIV/AIDS messages in the press and therefore commended the weekly cartoon strip on the back page of the Sunday Punch as a good example of this. The cartoon strip titled Let's talk about HIV/AIDS seeks to educate readers about the epidemic and correct popular misconceptions about the disease. It commended the paper's management for “good corporate social responsibility”.

Overall, the report named Post Express as topping the list of published HIV-related stories during the month under review with a total number of 15. The Guardian, ThisDay and Daily Times followed with 12 stories each. The Punch, touted as the nation's largest circulating newspaper, had the least figure of three.

MFWA Hosts Summit on Liberia as Detained Journalist is Feared Killed

The Accra-based Media Foundation for West Africa has scheduled a summit of human rights promoters, journalists, media stakeholders and free expression promoters to discuss the rapidly deteriorating state of media freedom and freedom of expression and human rights in the West African country of Liberia under President Charles Taylor. The organisation which is a coalition of press freedom and free expression organisations in various West African countries says the meeting has become necessary because of the increasing and heightening wave of repression and violent attacks on individuals and institutions in that country.

MFWA in a statement by its Executive Director Prof. Kwame Karikari said it has researched and compiled a dossier on abuses of human rights since Charles Taylor became President of Liberia. The statement said as an organisation working to promote press freedom and freedom of expression in West Africa, the MFWA is deeply concerned about this state of affairs. It proposed to launch its findings on the human rights situation in Liberia during the meeting.

Currently, as a result of systematic attacks against anyone or group who expresses or is likely to express opinions different from that of the government of Charles Taylor; independent media and journalists face daily attacks, arrests, and torture, most trained and experienced journalists have fled the country and the newspapers still on the newsstands cannot predict their existence beyond one day.

For instance, Star Radio, closed down two years ago, remained closed while other stations have no freedom to broadcast, as they would want to. Political parties, other than Charles Taylor's, cannot operate freely and all known leaders, active members of opposition parties and outspoken human rights advocates have been either forced into exile or absolutely silenced by fear. Some have even been killed.

Professional bodies, such as the Bar Association, are regularly intimidated; its leaders constantly under threat of attacks and leaders of independent civil society groups cannot operate under the current atmosphere of fear and threat of physical violence.

MFWA said the situation in Liberia is one of massive government imposed silence which is now beyond being dangerous but is deadly for anyone, or any group, who professes to speak out about any public issue. It said Liberia is easily today, in one of the most degenerate human rights conditions in all of Africa. The dates for the meeting to be held in Accra are July 22 and 23, 2002.
The latest acts of aggression against the media occurred on June 24 with the arrest and detention of editor of The Analyst newspaper, Hassan Bility and two others, on allegations of a plot to overthrow the Liberian government. Latest information from human rights sources in Monrovia say the journalists are feared dead in the hands of state security. The government, despite a court order, failed to produce the three in court on two occasions, after human rights lawyers filed a writ of habeas corpus.

Bility and the two others were arrested on June 24 for allegedly operating a "terrorist cell" for the LURD dissidents fighting the government of President Charles Taylor. Information Minister Reginald Goodridge said the security intercepted an e-mail communication to Bility from exiled opposition politician, Alhaji Kromah, which provided details of the alleged coup. Kromah was a rival faction leader to Mr. Taylor during the civil war and also headed the All Liberian Coalition Party (ALCOP), which came second in the 1997 presidential elections. Bility and Kromah belong to the same Mandingo ethnic group.

The allegation meant that the journalist would have been charged with treason which is a first-degree felony in the Liberian justice system and punishable by death.

According to information gathered by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), Bility’s family members could not see him for many days after his arrest, while efforts by human rights lawyers to locate him proved futile. In addition, all state security agencies denied having Bility and the others in their custody, though the government publicly admitted detaining them.

The Liberian government of Mr. Taylor recently intensified its onslaught on the media with arrest and detention of several journalists and closure of many news media organisations.

Bility, together with his newspaper, The Analyst, has been a victim of the recent spate of harassment and proscription of independent journalists and media houses in Liberia.

In April, when The Analyst carried the text of a speech made by Tiawan Gongloe, a prominent human rights lawyer who was brutally tortured in police cells, security forces shut down the offices of the newspaper and launched a manhunt for Bility. In May 2001, state security forces confiscated the computers of The Analyst and declared Bility "wanted." He was accused of subversion for allegedly sending information to Mr. Kromah. Bility remained underground until the Press Union of Liberia negotiated his freedom.

In 1998 officers of the Special Operation Division (SOD) of the Liberia National Police, acting upon the orders of Police Director Joe Tate its then director, arrested and flogged Bility, then editor of The Nation newspaper. Bility bled through the nose and ears as a result of the torture inflicted on him. The action followed an editorial in The Nation newspaper criticizing the brutal methods of Mr. Tate.

MFWA in a statement had expressed deep concern about the security of Bility. The organisation noted that its concern is based on the disappearance of seven Liberian refugees arrested in a UNHCR vehicle by state security in June 2000. The Liberian government claimed the returning refugees were dissidents plotting to overthrow the government after a photograph of an opposition politician was found with one of the returnees. They were charged with treason but their whereabouts remain unknown to date, despite legal challenges to the government to produce them in a court of law.

In another development security forces in Monrovia on July 4 arrested and detained senior reporter Bobby Tapson and judicial reporter Sheriff Adams, both of The News newspaper.

On the same day of the arrests of Tapson and Adams, state security personnel also arrested Suku Wesseh, a Liberian staff of the UNHCR, and brother of Conmany Wesseh, exiled Executive Director of the Centre for Democratic Empowerment.

According to information by MFWA-Liberia, the journalists were arrested in connection with a publication in the July 4, 2002 edition of The News, headlined: Terror Descends On Monrovia. The paper reported the discovery of dead bodies of people in the
streets of Monrovia in recent weeks. Residents of Monrovia, in recent weeks, have been tense as dead bodies are found in places around the city regularly.

**Competition Heats Up for Control of .org Domain**

*By JOHN MARKOFF*

An intense, largely behind-the-scenes competition is under way for the right to manage the global database that keeps track of Internet addresses of noncommercial organizations.

Although the business of registering Internet names has begun to shrink this year, as many as eight or nine bids are expected at a meeting this month in Bucharest, Romania, when the group that oversees Internet addresses will decide who should manage the list of names that end in .org.

The decision will shift the .org domain from VeriSign Inc., which currently manages the list of 2.7 million organizations. The company struck a deal with the oversight organization, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, or Icann, last year that extended VeriSign's control over .com and .net addresses in exchange for giving up the .org designation. VeriSign, based in Mountain View, Calif., also promised to contribute $5 million to assist in the transition.

Although the management of .org was once intended to go to a nonprofit organization, the competition has more recently attracted some profit-minded businesses.

In addition, the competition is likely to become much more visible with the entry on Monday of two iconoclastic Internet pioneers who say that many of the entrants have served as shields for large businesses that are hoping to help themselves to what some analysts estimate will be a $10-million-a-year business.

One of these pioneers, Carl Malamud, has previously forced the government to make Securities and Exchange Commission financial data available freely over the Internet. His partner, Paul Vixie, has been a longtime Internet software developer and a determined opponent of unsolicited commercial e-mail, known as spam. The two said they intended to run the .org registry on a nonprofit basis.

Mr. Malamud and Mr. Vixie say their plan differs from those of other competitors because they intend to place the database software needed to operate the .org name system in the public domain.

"Is this a public trust or a public trough?" Mr. Malamud asked.

James Love, director of the Consumer Project on Technology, a Washington lobbying group, says the competition has drawn commercial bidders that have associated themselves with a nonprofit organization to improve the appearance in front of the Icann review committee.

But Icann's supporters respond that the organization has created a process that will select the group that will best manage the database.

"Icann is trying hard to make sure this isn't a gold rush," said Esther Dyson, chairwoman of EDventure Holdings and a former chairwoman of Icann.

One of the first partnerships to announce a planned bid is Poptel, the British manager of the new .coop domain, and AusRegistry, the operator of the Australian .au country domain. The two companies are calling their partnership Unity Registry.

Another bid is being planned by Global Name Registry, a British company that was recently awarded the .name domain, in conjunction with the International Red Cross, according to several people close to the company's plans.

In a similar fashion, Afilias Global Registry Services, which was recently awarded the .info domain, is planning to submit a bid in conjunction with the Internet Society, the nonprofit organization that oversees the Internet standards group, the Internet Engineering Taskforce.

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There has also been speculation among a number of people involved in the bidding process that even though VeriSign originally struck a deal to release the .org domain, it is planning a bid of its own.

Icann's request for proposals has emphasized both diversifying control over the approved domains as well as a complex proposal process to qualify the bidders.

"The board wants a stable well-functioning .org registry," said Miriam Sapiro, founder of Summit Strategies International, a Washington company specializing in Internet policy and international issues. "It doesn't want to take a risk and jeopardize the domain names of 2.7 million organizations."

Mr. Malamud, who heads the Internet Multicasting Society, an organization in Stewarts Point, Calif., that develops open source Internet software, and Mr. Vixie, who founded the Internet Software Consortium, a group in Redwood City, Calif., that develops open source versions of crucial Internet infrastructure software, said they planned to place the complex software used to manage domain names in the public domain as open source, freely available to any organization.

They say that would have the twin effect of making it simpler for Icann to diversify control of the domains as well as making it easier to create new ones. The issue is a hotly debated one that the organization, which was created under a contract with the United States Commerce Department, is struggling with.

"This shouldn't be a dot-com opportunity," Mr. Malamud said. "There has been a lot of smoke and mirrors, but what we need is actually a public utility that is well managed in the public interest."

ATTACKS ON THE PRESS IN JUNE 2002

NUJ Alleges Victimization in Redeployment of Journalists

The Kwara State Council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) on June 10 issued a statement alleging that a recent redeployment of four senior journalists from Kwara Radio and Television Corporation (KRTC) to the Ministry of Information was a case of victimization.

The NUJ in a two-page statement signed by the Council Chairman, Alhaji Tunde Akanbi and General Secretary, Comrade Bisi Adebayo, also described the action as uncalled for considering the fact that Alhaja Amidat Yusuf Suleiman of Kwara TV had recently been deployed to the same ministry. It added that: "The Council is more confounded and at a loss at the hurried deployment in view of the fact that the corporation has just set up an ad hoc committee on the merger of the two erstwhile corporations." The Council expressed the view that for justice to be done and be seen to have been done, any redeployment, if necessary should have waited for the outcome of the committee.

The NUJ maintained that the redeployment via a letter signed by Mr. E. A Olusola was unprofessional insisting that the affected journalists were "all competent and have been performing their duties as expected."

Messrs. Kayode Adeyipo, Director of News and Current Affairs in the Radio service and former Chairman of the Kwara NUJ Council; Tayo Arowosariye, Secretary of the NUJ in the State; Mahmud Abdulraheem, and Bunmi Adedoyin, former Secretary of the Radio Kwara Chapel of NUJ all staff of KRTC, were by a letter dated June 5, redeployed to the Ministry of Information.

The Ondo State Council of the NUJ also condemned the action. In a statement signed by Dele Atunbi, the Secretary of the Council, it described the redeployment as a renewed siege on the press by the civilian administration and a calculated measure to silence the press, an
action which it said it would resist. The Council urged the governor to emulate the Head of State who doesn't interfere with federal government owned broadcast stations.

**Governor Summons, Threatens Journalists**

Akwa Ibom State Executive Governor, Obong Victor Attah, on May 27 summoned Messrs Haruna Acheneje and Aniekan Bassey, the State correspondents of The Punch and The Guardian newspapers respectively to his official residence in Uyo. He ordered the journalists to defend some stories published by their newspapers which they wrote.

The Director of Press Affairs to the governor, Mr. Udeme Nana, took the journalists along with the Chairman of the Correspondent Chapel of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in the State, Mr. Bonny Nyong, to the venue where the governor interrogated them.

Available information said *The Guardian* correspondent gave "satisfactory" answers to the governor's questions and was therefore pardoned. But the governor was not convinced by the explanations of The Punch correspondent.

The governor's grouse with *The Punch* correspondent were reports that described the governor as an advocate of caretaker committee for local councils and another that suggests that there are factions within the State Chapter of the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

The governor allegedly verbally assaulted the journalist whose explanations he felt were not satisfactory. The governor accused the journalist of not showing respect to an "elder". Mr. Acheneje, therefore, left his seat and knelt down before the governor as a sign of respect. The visibly angry Governor Attah then debunked the existence of a faction in the State PDP saying such existed in the journalist's mind adding that the Party's national Chairman, Audu Ogbe had inaugurated the State party executive during his visit to the State.

Attempts by Acheneje to justify his reports only infuriated the governor the more. Governor Attah threatened to deal with Acheneje because of his 'unrepentant' attitude.

**Maritime Reporters Assaulted**

Two maritime reporters, Mr. Sesan Onilemo of *Daily Champion* newspapers and Aloy Opara of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) were on June 3 arrested and detained at the Tin Can Island in Lagos. The incident took place during the maiden visit of the Port's Managing Director, Arc. Aminu Dabo.

Security operatives locked up all the gates against port users (legal and illegal) as well as journalists. Attempts by the two journalists to explain to the officials that it was their duty to cover the visit were rebuffed. The security officials also attempted to lock up the journalists. The timely intervention of some Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) officials saved the two journalists from being thrown behind bars.

**Journalists Barred from Tribunal Sitting**

Journalists who reported to cover the proceeding of the Code of Conduct Tribunal sitting in Bauchi in the first week of June were barred from covering the sitting.

Journalists were ordered to leave the Bauchi High Court 1, venue of the Tribunal sitting by the Tribunal's Registrar, Mallam Mohammed Haliru, who told them: "we don't need the media." He promised to make available, a statement at the end of the Tribunal's sitting.

The tribunal was trying about 150 public office holders for unethical conducts.

**Teacher Assaults Journalist**

Mr. Lanre Olayiwola, a journalist with *The Guardian* newspapers was during the month assaulted by Dapo Olaseinde in Surulere area of Lagos.
Olaseinde, a teacher by profession, beat up the reporter while investigating a case involving a housemaid whom her guardian burnt her fingers and thighs. The maid’s guardian was simply identified as Mama Adeola.

Olaseinde, after assaulting the reporter warned him to steer clear of the matter. He further threatened to deal with the journalist if he went on with his investigation.

Panel Bar Journalists from Sitting

The Justice Bolaninwa Babalakin Judicial panel probing bribery allegations leveled against Lagos High Court Judge, Justice Augustine Ade Alabi, on June 20 barred journalists from covering its sitting at the Kirikiri Prisons in Lagos.

This was the second time journalists would be barred from its sitting. They were first restrained from covering its proceedings on April 1. At the observation of Chief Afe Babalola, counsel to Justice Alabi, to the presence of journalists, the chairman ordered them to leave the venue and the panel met in secret.

JOURNALISM / PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS

2002 Commonwealth Arts And Crafts Awards

The Commonwealth Foundation has announced its 2002 Commonwealth Arts and Crafts Awards for young artists and crafts people. Under the awards programme, 10 applicants are selected every two years and given a grant of £6,000 each to travel and study in another Commonwealth country. The awards are open to artists and craftspeople under 35 who have had little opportunity to work in another country.

The grants are allocated to individuals who are not only passionate about their work, but who are also good at communicating ideas and skills, and have the ability to plan, organise and manage their award and make the most of the opportunities it provides, said Emma D’Costa, project manager of the awards.

The scheme attracts a diverse range of talented artists and craftspeople working across a wide span of different media, including basketry, ceramics, decorative arts, glass, installation art, jewelry, painting, printmaking, recycled materials, sculpture, textiles and woodcarving.

Since its launch in 1987, some 70 artists from 28 countries have benefited from the programme.

"The awards demonstrate what the Commonwealth is all about - cultural diversity, sharing and building bridges," said Colin Ball, the Foundation's Director.

Ichia Tiyi, a Barbadian jeweler currently in Ghana courtesy of an award, reports: "Everyone here in Ghana is so curious about Barbados, our culture, lifestyles and customs, so apart from working, we spend a lot of time in cultural dialogue."

And for many it's only the beginning. "I feel like I've scratched a million surfaces, and now need to go back and investigate each one," said Canadian artist Shelley Miller about her time in India.

A winning Australian sculptor, Judy Gough, adds: "Over time, my cultural preconceptions became apparent to me as I stayed in Mauritius and I realised that this is a real voyage and journey as much into myself as it is about the outer world of experiencing a new place and peoples."

The London-based Commonwealth Foundation, founded in 1966, is funded by Commonwealth governments. Its mission is to promote the work of civil society, enhance Commonwealth understanding and provide linkage between the official and the peoples of the Commonwealth.
Deadline for completed applications is October 1, 2002. The entry form is available at www.commonwealthfoundation.com or by contacting the Commonwealth Foundation, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HY, UK. Tel: +44 (0)20 7930 3783; Fax: +44 (0)20 7839 8157.

**CPU Calls for Entries for Astor Award**

The Commonwealth Press Union (CPU) is calling for applications for nomination for the 2002 edition of the annual Astor Award. The award is for individuals who have made outstanding contributions to press freedom or to the promotion of the Commonwealth newspaper industry.

Nominations are to be received latest August 31 and should include the name of the nominee, details about the newspaper(s) he works with and a brief article stating why the person should be nominated.

The award which was named in honour of Lord Astor of Hever, a past president of the CPU, would be presented to the winner at its biennial conference in Sri Lanka in October.

Nominations are to be sent to Lindsay Ross at Lindsay@cpu.org.uk. Further information can be viewed and/or downloaded from http://www.cpu.org.uk/astor.html

**United States Institute of Peace Senior Fellowship Competition**

The United States Institute of Peace invites applications for the 2002-2003 Senior Fellowship competition in the Jennings Randolph Program for International Peace. The program aims to strengthen the nation's capacity to promote the peaceful resolution of international conflict. Fellowships are awarded annually to scholars and practitioners from a variety of professions, including college and university faculty, journalists, diplomats, writers, educators, military officers, international negotiators and lawyers.

The Institute funds projects related to preventive diplomacy, ethnic and regional conflicts, peacekeeping and peace operations, peace settlements, post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, democratization and the rule of law, cross-cultural negotiations, U.S. foreign policy in the 21st century, and related topics. Fellows reside at the Institute for a period of up to ten months to conduct research on their projects, consult with staff, and contribute to the ongoing work of the Institute. Projects which demonstrate relevance to current policy debates will be highly competitive.

The fellowship award includes a stipend, an office with computer and voicemail, and a part-time research assistant. The competition is open to citizens of all nations. Women and members of minorities are especially encouraged to apply.

Contact: The Jennings Randolph Program, U.S. Institute of Peace, 1200 17th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036-3011, USA, Tel: (202) 429-3886; Fax: (202)-429-6063; E-mail: jrprogram@usip.org. Web Site: www.usip.org

DEADLINE: September 17, 2002 for the 2003-04 Awards.

**Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Fellowships**

The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Fellowships is accepting applications from interested candidates for its program of advanced research in public affairs.

The award, which commemorates both the scholarly depth and public concerns of Woodrow Wilson, is given to approximately 20 residential fellowships annually in an international competition to individuals with outstanding project proposals from the entire range of scholarship.

For academic participants, eligibility is limited to the post-doctoral level. For non-academics, an equivalent degree of professional achievement is expected. Basic criteria for
project acceptance are importance and originality; applicant's scholarly project; fresh and critical research; and likelihood that the work will advance basic understanding of the topic under study.

Appointment lasts for the academic year, September to May or June. Travel expenses for dependent children, fellows and spouses are provided. Contact: Fellowships Office, Woodrow Wilson Center, One Woodrow Wilson Plaza, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20523; Tel: (202) 691-4170; Fax: (202) 691-4001.

DEADLINE for submission of application is October 1.

**Fund for Investigative Journalism**

The Fund for Investigative Journalism (FIJ) of Washington, DC in the United States has grants of $500 to $10,000 to reporters working outside the protection and backing of major news organizations. The Fund also gives an annual $25,000 FIJ Book Prize which is awarded in November. The grants are limited to journalists seeking help for investigative pieces for newspapers and magazines, books, and radio and television documentaries involving corruption, malfeasance, incompetence and societal ills in general, as well as for media criticism.

There is no application form. The applicant must write a letter outlining the story. The letter must be supported by a resume, budget, writing samples, and a commitment from an editor or publisher to consider publishing or broadcasting the final product. The board meets in March, July and November and applications should be submitted by the first of the previous month. Contact: Peg Lotito, Email: fundfij@aol.com

**Entries Invited For Excellence In Environmental Reporting**

The World Conservation Union is receiving nominations for the 2002 Reuters-IUCN Media Awards. The awards, which were established in 1998, aim at raising global awareness of environmental and sustainable development issues, by encouraging excellence in environmental reporting worldwide.

The award is open to print and Internet journalists from six regions - Latin America; North America; Europe; Asia; English-speaking Africa, including the Middle East; and French-speaking Africa. All submissions must have been published between August 30, 2001 and July 31, 2002.

One winner from each region will be invited to attend the Global Awards Ceremony taking place in Berlin, during the ECOmove Film Festival, in the first week of December 2002. The global winner will receive a prize of $US5,000.

Candidates may submit one article only, accompanied by the entry form, to the nearest IUCN office. Entries written in a language other than English, French or Spanish must be accompanied by a translation. The deadline for entries is August 5, 2001.

For more information and application forms visit website: http://www.foundation.reuters.com and http://iucn.org/reuters, or contact: Jo Weir on e-mail: jo.weir@reuters.com

**Entries For The 2003 Golden Pen Of Freedom Award Open**

Nominations are being received for the 2003 Golden Pen of Freedom, the annual award made by World Association of Newspapers (WAN) in recognition of the outstanding action, in writing or deed, of an individual, a group or an institution in the cause of press freedom.

The rules for the attribution of the Golden Pen state that freedom of the press should be "taken in the general sense of freedom of expression" but also stipulate that the action in favour of press freedom for which the award is made must have been undertaken for "the benefit of all
and not for the sole benefit of a person who would later refuse this same freedom to the expression of opinions different from his own”.

Deadline for applications is August 3, 2002 and applications must be supported by adequate details and documentation. For details, visit the website: http://www.wan-press.org

“A free press will sometimes make uncomfortable reading for any politician. But any passing embarrassment or justified indignation must never blind us to its vital role in both the health and protection of democracy.”

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, May 3, 2001

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