In This Issue
1. Nigerian Media Bill Goes Through Second Reading at House of Representatives
   - Why the National Assembly Must Support The Media Bill - Hon. Chibudom
2. Conference Calls for Formation of Union of West African Public Broadcasting Institutions
   - Recommendations of the Conference on Public Broadcasting in W/Africa
3. Be Warned, FG Tells Foreign Media
4. BBC, German Radio Donate to VQN
5. Nobody Dictates to Me - Eddie Iroh
6. Gbenga Obasanjo, Another, Sue Daily Trust, NNN
7. NPAN Seeks Resuscitation of Newsprint Firm
8. Freedom House focus on Nigeria
   - Nigeria Ranks as Partially Free - Freedom House
9. Governor Sacks Radio Management Inaugurates Interim Committee
10. Code Of Ethics For Nigerian Journalists
11. CPJ Urges African Union to Guarantee Press Freedom
12. Africa Alerts... Africa Alerts... Africa Alerts...
   a. Democratic Republic of Congo: Bonsange Transferred to Hospital
   b. Niger: Human Rights Advocate Sentenced to 12 Months Imprisonment
   c. Liberia: Nyenetu Released, Hassan Bility Still Incommunicado
13. ATTACKS ON THE PRESS IN SEPTEMBER 2002
14. JOURNALISM / PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS

Nigerian Media Bill Goes Through Second Reading at House of Representatives

The Nigerian Media Bill, which seeks to harmonise all media laws, protect media freedom and ensure the independence and effectiveness of regulatory agencies, has sailed through a second reading at the House of Representatives, where it received widespread support.

The Bill, sponsored by the Deputy Speaker of the House, Prince Chibudom Nwuche, has been consigned to four committees for further consideration following extensive debate on the floor of the House by members.

The committees to which the Bill has been consigned are those on Information, Communications, Justice, and Human Rights.

They will review the content of the Bill and prepare their reports which will be presented to the full House at the third reading. If the House passes the Bill, it will then be passed on to the Senate for similar consideration and possible passage.

Introducing the Bill on the floor of the House, Prince Nwuche told his colleagues that it had harmonized all laws relating to the media in Nigeria and urged them to support it as "its passage would ease the bottlenecks in our media industry and ultimately safeguard our democracy."

He noted that it had long been recognized that a virile, independent and robust media is an indispensable adjunct to sustainable democracy.

Observing that this was the reason why the framers of the 1999 Constitution entrenched freedom of expression and of the press in Section 39 of the Constitution, he regretted that "this constitutionally guaranteed freedom has, to a large extent, been attenuated due largely to the multiplicity of legislation dealing with specific aspects of the mass media."

Prince Nwuche said the result has been a complex tangle of laws that are at times contradictory of each other or directly at cross-purpose with the ideals set out in the Constitution.
Tracing the history of the Bill, he said media practitioners and stakeholders in the media industry saw the need for the legal and institutional framework guiding the industry to be properly harmonized and streamlined.

The result was a Media Law Reform Workshop, jointly organized by Media Rights Agenda; ARTICLE 19, the Global Campaign for Free Expression, based in London; and the National Human Rights Commission, at Ota in Ogun State, from March 16 to 18, 1999. The meeting was attended by 61 representatives of the media, both independent and state controlled; regulatory bodies; the legal profession; international institutions; local and international non-governmental organizations; representatives of inter-governmental bodies such as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Dr. Abid Hussain; and a member of the European Parliament, Ms Glenys Kinnock; as well as other interest groups.

Out of the workshop emerged the Ota Platform of Action on Media Law Reform in Nigeria.

The recommendations contained in the Ota Platform of Action, a consensus document which emerged at the end of that workshop, include that:

* Criminal sanctions are an inappropriate response to breaches of journalistic ethics. Accordingly, such criminal sanctions should be removed from all legislation, where they exist.
* Any Press Council should ideally be non-statutory and funded by the stakeholders. However, until such time as this is possible, any statutory Press Council should be effectively self-regulating and, as far as possible, fully independent of government. To this end, Decree No 85 of 1992 should be substantially amended.
* The 1964 Printing Press Act and similar laws should be repealed.
* The fundamental principle governing public broadcasting is that it should be fully independent of government in terms of editorial independence, method of funding, and appointments processes. Accordingly, Decree No 38 of 1992 should be amended to ensure that the National Broadcasting Commission is fully independent of government and that all members of the Commission should be appointed by and accountable to the National Assembly.
* The issuing and revocation of licenses by the NBC should be transparent, non-discriminatory and should encourage diversity, such as through community broadcasting.
* There should be a comprehensive review of all content-related offences as provided by law. In particular, all existing provisions regarding sedition, "false news" and criminal defamation (including the Defamatory and Offensive Publications Act, 1966) should be repealed at the earliest opportunity. The Obscene Publications Act should be reviewed so as to make it serve a more specifically targeted public interest objective.

Prince Nwuche noted that the Ota Platform of Action had been widely commended and endorsed by representatives of intergovernmental agencies such as the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression as well as by representatives of the public and private media in Nigeria, local and international human rights organizations, the legal profession, and other media stakeholders.

He said: "This widely accepted conference paper has formed the basis of our effort in streamlining the laws regulating the media industry to make them more responsive to the wishes and aspirations of our people and to give life to the solemn declarations in Section 39 of our Constitution."

Endorsing the view that the fundamental principle governing public service broadcasting is that it should be completely free from political interference and pressures, Prince Nwuche said: "The overbearing presence of Government officials in the media regulatory organ should be curtailed. The issuing and revocation of licences by the NBC should be transparent, non-discriminatory, and should encourage diversity. Above all, the process must be subject to judicial review."

The Nigerian Media Bill, published in Volume 89 of the Federal Government's Official Gazette of August 21, 2002 as Government Notice No. 135, contains 108 sections and six schedules. Part One, containing Sections 1 to 54, deals with the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC),
which is the regulatory body for the broadcast media. In its various sections, the Bill sets out the objectives of the commission, its powers which include receiving, processing, considering applications and approving the grant of licences under a three-tier system of public, commercial and community broadcasting services for the ownership of radio and television stations.

It also outlines the composition of the commission and methods of appointment of members and goes on to provide in detail for all the activities listed in the National Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38 of 1992, as amended, reviewing the clearly restrictive and oppressive provisions.

Part Two, containing Sections 55 to 76, deals with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), a public owned news service organization. Its objectives include seeking, obtaining and otherwise receiving through subscription, payment exchange or other means, international, regional, local and other news, news materials and news features, and distributing these to subscribers against payment either in the form of fees or news exchange or on such other agreed terms.

The Bill goes on to reproduce all the technical details contained in the News Agency of Nigeria Act, Chapter 290, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990, as amended by the News Agency of Nigeria (Amendment) Decree No. 87 of 1992, streamlining it in such a manner as to be consistent with the purpose and scope of the bill.

Part Three, containing Sections 77 to 108, deals with the Nigerian Press Council, which is charged with the duty of enquiring into complaints about the conduct of any person or organization towards the press as well as monitoring the activities of the press to ensure compliance with the code of ethics of the Nigeria Union of Journalists.

Among other things, the Bill provides for the granting of licences under a three-tier system of public, commercial and community broadcasting.

Another major contentious issue, which the Bill seeks to address, is the mode of appointment of the directors general and removal from office of board members. Unlike the present practice where the President appoints the DGs on the advice of the Minister for Information, the Bill provides that the National Assembly should confirm the appointment. The Bill also provides that for the President to remove a DG or any member of the board, the President shall "make a recommendation to this effect to the Senate of the National Assembly and if the recommendation is approved, the President may declare, in writing the office of that member vacant".

These provisions address fears that the processes of appointment and removal from office of the DGs and board members as it stands now is subject to political considerations.

In the area of the granting of licences, the Bill provides that there shall be public hearing to allow for openness and transparency.

With respect to the Nigeria Press Council, the Bill provides that the Chairperson shall be appointed by the President. But unlike in the case of the NBC board, the appointment is to be "on the recommendation of the Nigeria Press Organisation through the Ministers for Information", and is not subject to the confirmation of the National Assembly.

While the Executive Secretary of the Council is authorized under the bill as in the principal Decree and its amendment to maintain a register of accredited journalists, the bill seeks to resolve the apparent powers granted the Council by the amendment to the Decree to virtually take over the registration of journalists.

In section 79(b), it provides that the Council shall monitor the activities of the Press with a view to ensuring the compliance with the code of ethics of the "Nigerian Journalists as adopted" by the Nigeria Press Organisation.

However, in another breath, Section 85(3) says the council shall "adopt the code of ethics of the Nigerian journalists provided by the Nigeria Press council"

Effectively, the NUJ has been stripped of the prerogative of fashioning out a code of ethics to guide its members’ professional conduct. The responsibility now rests on the NPO which comprises all the professional associations in the print media including the NUJ.
This was a compromise position reached by the stakeholders during the stakeholders workshops that led to the drafting the bill.

Importantly, the Bill also seeks to resolve the obnoxious provisions introduced by the NPC Amendment Decree which grants the council powers to register newspapers and magazines. Those provisions were identical to those contained in the Newspapers Decree No. 43 of 1993, which was rejected by stakeholders and was repealed by the Newspapers (Repeal) Decree No. 57 of 1999, made on May 26, 1999.

The Bill simply provides that the council shall receive from the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria, "its register of members".


**Why the National Assembly Must Support The Media Bill**

- **Hon. Chibudom**

Hon. Speaker, and my colleagues, it is my honour to introduce to you this Bill for an Act to harmonise all laws relating to the Media to ensure the independence and effectiveness of Regulatory Agencies within the Media; and for related purposes.

**INTRODUCTION**

It has long been recognized that a virile, independent and robust media is an indispensable adjunct to sustainable democracy. That, perhaps, is why the framers of our Constitution, in recognition of this fact entrenched freedom of expression and the press in Section 39 of our Constitution. However, this constitutionally guaranteed freedom has to a large extent been attenuated due largely to the multiplicity of legislation dealing with specific aspects of the mass media. The result has been a complex tangle of laws that are at times contradictory of each other, or directly at cross-purpose with the ideals espoused in our Constitution.

Media practitioners and stakeholders in the media industry saw the need for the legal and institutional framework guiding the industry to be properly harmonized and streamlined. A broad coalition of local and foreign NGOs dealing with media activities in conjunction with the Nigerian Human Rights Commission organized in March 1999, a media law workshop, out of which emerged the Otta Platform of Action for Media Law Reform in Nigeria. This document was widely commended and indeed endorsed by representatives of intergovernmental agencies such as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression; the Human Rights Group of the European Parliament; representatives of the public and private media in Nigeria; local and international human rights organisations, the legal profession; and other media stakeholders. This widely accepted conference paper has formed the basis of our effort in streamlining the laws regulating the media industry to make them more responsive to the wishes and aspirations of our people and to give life to the solemn declarations in Section 39 of our Constitution.

**THE BILL**

Hon. Speaker and my Colleagues, the Bill under consideration, is contained in 108 sections. It also has six schedules attached thereto.
Part 1, containing Sections 1-54 deals with the National Broadcasting Commission. This is the apex regulatory body in the media industry. In its various sections, it sets out the objectives of the commission; the powers of the commission, which include receiving, processing, considering application and approving grant licenses under a three-tier system of public, commercial and community broadcasting services for the ownership of radio and television stations. It further sets out the composition of the commission and methods of appointment thereto. It goes on to provide in details for all the activities listed in the National Broadcasting Commission Decree of 1992 as amended. Save for the clearly restrictive and oppression provisions.

Part II, containing Sections 55-76 deal with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). This is a public owned news service organization and its' objectives among other include:- to seek, obtain and otherwise receive through subscription, payment exchange or other means international, regional, local and other news, news materials and news features; and to distribute such news, news materials and new features to subscribers against payment either in the form of fees or news exchange or on such terms as may be agreed.

It goes on to reproduce all the technical details contained in the News Agency of Nigeria Act Cap. 290 laws of Nigeria 1990 as amended by the Amendment Decree No. 87 of 1992, taking care, however, to streamline it in such a manner as to be consistent with the purpose and scope of this Bill.

Part III, containing Section 77-108 deals with the Nigeria Press Council (NPC). The council is charge with the duty of enquiring into complaints about the conduct of the press and the conduct of any person or organization towards the press, and exercising in respect of the complaints, the powers conferred upon it under the Bill. It also includes monitoring the activities of the Press with a view to ensuring compliance with the code of ethics of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, as adopted for registration of journalists and for penalties for unprofessional conduct.

The Bill finally repeals some existing laws that are incompatible with the practice of journalism and with the guaranteed freedom of expression in section 39 of the Constitution.

They include:
2. The Offensive Publications (Proscription) Decree No. 35 of 1993
4. The Obscene Publication Act Cap 530 Laws of the Federation 1990; among others.

The Bill has six schedules containing Supplementary Provision Relating to the NBC: Forms for application for a grant of license, "Terms of license" Supplementary Provisions Relating to the Board; Forms of Summons etc.

CONCLUSION
Hon. Speaker, my colleagues, that in a nutshell is the Media Bill before you for consideration. The Bill has harmonized all laws relating to the media in our country. The fundamental principles governing public service broadcasting is that it should be completely free from political interference and pressures in terms of editorial independence, method of funding, appointment and removal processes. The overbearing presence of Government officials in the media regulatory organ should be curtailed. The issuing and revocation of licenses by the NBC should be transparent, non-discriminatory, and should encourage diversity. Above all, the process must be subject to judicial review.

I urge you my colleagues, to support this Bill, at its' passage would ease the bottlenecks in our media industry, and ultimately safeguard our democracy.
Conference Calls for Formation of Union of West African Public Broadcasting Institutions

Participants at a regional conference on Public Service Broadcasting in West Africa in Accra, Ghana, rose with a call for the establishment of a Union of West African Public Broadcasting Institutions. The meeting which ended on September 18, 2002, also called for continuous state-funding of Public Service Broadcasting and as well the setting up of Special Trust Funds for public broadcast media.

The participants which included heads of Public Service Broadcasting Organisations, heads of Regulatory Bodies, regional media organizations and other regional stakeholders, reiterated the critical role of public service broadcasting in society especially as a means of fostering unity and cultural identity as well as ensuring access to information to all sectors of society.

The three-day meeting, which began on September 16, was held under the auspices of Accra-based Media Foundation for West Africa and ARTICLE 19, based in London.

The meeting deliberated on the need for reform of public service broadcasting in the West Africa sub-region, to reflect and sustain the new democratic dispensation and to allow popular participation in public affairs.

Participants examined the major challenges facing public service broadcasting organizations and identified priority actions to be taken collectively to address them.

The participants reiterated the critical role of public service broadcasting in society especially as a means of fostering unity and cultural identity as well as ensuring access to information to all sectors of society.

In a statement at the conference, Ghana's Minister for Information and Presidential Affairs, Mr. Jake Obetsebi-Lamptey, observed that "there is a massive wave of media pluralism, which is phenomenal by any standards, particularly in the West African sub-region".

While he welcomed the growth of media pluralism, as an indication of the just and rightful demands of an evolving and dynamic society to be allowed to exercise its unfettered freedoms of choice and taste in informing and educating itself, he added that the development has posed new and critical challenges to the state-owned broadcasting institution which has since independence enjoyed absolute monopoly without contest in any area of operation. He observed further that the current performance of some state-owned broadcasting institutions in some countries indicate that they were ill prepared for this wave of media pluralism and find the challenges highly competitive.

He insisted that competition aside, public service broadcasters must not abandon functions like the dissemination of major national economic policies, campaign for social mobilization on a national scale for economic or infrastructural construction, major public health campaigns, campaigns for peace and unity, mass education on political participation and civic responsibility and spread of popular culture and artistic expression from all ethnic groups.

He, therefore, urged participants to gear their deliberation towards the eventual socio-economic integration of the ECOWAS sub-region as an essential input to the Africa Union.

Earlier, John Barker, head of Africa Office of ARTICLE 19, stated the objective of the conference. According to him, the principal objective of the conference was to assess the state of public service broadcasting in the region, and to seek ways and means of responding to the challenges facing them by promoting reforms to meet the challenges of today and the future.

Giving further insight into the background to the conference Prof. Kwame Karikari, Executive Director, Media Foundation for West Africa, said the underlying purpose was to examine the emerging legal and institutional environment for broadcast media operations in view of the competition generated by the advent of independent broadcasters that had broken the monopolies hitherto enjoyed by state-owned broadcast stations.

The competition manifests itself in the race to capture viewing audiences, advertising revenue, news and other programme interests, as well as for relevance and political space. Further, he observed that in some countries, there have been new legislation and regulatory regimes for broadcasting and communications generally. This results in new demands on management from
government and expectations from the public, as well, there have been fundamental reorientation in economic developments as well as in technological changes in communications.

Continuing, he said these developments in media are taking place, despite the many difficult social and political crises that the region has encountered, and added that it is also gratifying that the processes of social, political and economic integration of the region are going on rapidly.

The conference, he disclosed, was to bring leaders in the public sector broadcasting in the region to come together to share experiences and expertise gained and exchange ideas on how to advance public service broadcasting in the new environment of broadcast pluralism.

To facilitate the above objectives, the conference discussed questions pertaining to: the state of public (state-owned) broadcasting in the current context of pluralism; policies, legal and constitutional frameworks, and as they affect the editorial political independence of public service broadcasting; and regulatory agencies and regimes.

Others were; financing public service broadcasting - the current situation and future perspectives; and experiences and lessons of public service broadcast reforms and restructuring elsewhere.

Five main papers were presented which served as basis for the discussions. This was in addition to country reports on the state of press freedom and freedom of expression presented by some representatives from the different countries.

In his paper entitled: The State of Public Service (State-owned) Broadcasting in the Context of Pluralism in West Africa, Mr. Soule Issiaka, Director, Radio Nederland Wereldomroep, Africa Bureau, identified four obstacles to changes. These include the loss of aura and monopolistic privileges. The second obstacle he said was the legal status which quite often does not clearly state whether public broadcast institutions are business concerns or institutions, whether they are independent, autonomous, or under the supervision and control of government.

A third obstacle, he said, has to do with the human resources and the thorny issue of a drop in the quality and absence of a suitable training policy.

Lastly, he identified changes in technology which many public broadcasters in the sub-region are unable to keep due to poor financial standing.

In his intervention, Osaro Odemwingie, a Nigerian journalist and correspondent for Zongo-Giwa, the journal of Media Foundation for West Africa, said there is also the problem of appointees into head of public media trying to please their masters in government. This, he said, is not helped by the fact that there are often no means of guiding against the appointment of people who would do the bidding of the government of the day.

Mr. Ayikoue Fidele, Director General, ORTB, Cotonou, Republic of Benin, said that in many cases journalists are unable to report factually due to censorship by government officials who perpetrate this using the often faulty legal framework and the dependence on government funding.

Mr. Eddie Iroh, Director General of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) identified major problems to include the long period of military dictatorship, the problem of transition, expansion and individuals appointed into executive offices. He, therefore, suggested the setting up of a mass media commission to oversee the supervision of heads of public media institutions and as well recommended empowerment for those who administer public media to enable them resist intrusion from government officials. He said the problem is not lack of training facilities, but effectiveness. He cited FRCN Training School which he said needs support, as an example.

Mrs. Ammie Joof-Cole, African Women Media Centre, Senegal, said the main problem in her opinion is the funding policies which she said many African government use as a trap for any public broadcaster who tries to assert independence. She also blamed the low quality of programs which makes public broadcasters unpopular and hence unable to assert financial independence that could secure for it political independence.

This led Mr. J. Blidi Elliott, Director General, Liberia Broadcasting System to pose the question: can public service broadcasting institutions survive without government funding and without becoming commercialized?
Mr. Issiaka in his response noted that government funding should not erode the public service role of a government media. He added that even independent media is obliged to render some public service duties.

Responding to the observation made by Mr. Odemwingie, he said the impression should not be created that the media professional is not a good manager. The problem of censorship, he said, can often be traced to the professional background of the individual. He insisted that a true professional would do the proper reporting without being found out.

Andrew Puddephatt agreed by saying that the issue of human element is a question of personal integrity and professionalism.

The conference also heard country reports on the state of freedom of expression and press freedom. Among the countries from which reports were heard were Republic of Benin, Cote d'Iviore, Niger, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Ghana.

While there was relative unanimity on the situation in virtually all the country reports, in some cases because there was only one participant from some countries, the report on Nigeria as presented by Mr. Iroh drew criticism from Mr. Odemwingie.

Mr. Iroh in his report had indicated that the state of press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria is perhaps the best since the country achieved independence. He contended that the present government headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo has been most genial to media criticism and promoted free expression.

Mr. Odemwingie, however, disagreed. He held that virtually all the obnoxious laws promulgated by the military to hound the media remain in place. Although many of these laws are not routinely applied as before, Mr. Odemwingie contended that they nonetheless create a climate of fear.

He also referred to the appointments of chief executives of public media institutions and media regulatory bodies which are at the whims and caprices of the executive arm of government without the input and oversight responsibility of the legislative arm of the government. The situation he said encourages the appointment of individuals who are sympathetic to the executive and who then use their position to deny opposition voices as witnessed during one of the strikes by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) which the FRCN blacked out.

In his response, Mr. Iroh explained that the decision by FRCN to black out the NLC was taken by him without the prompting of government officials. He explained that he considered airing the NLC position as capable of escalating the conflict and threatening the peace and tranquility of the country.

Mr. Puddephatt in his contribution noted that the procedure for the appointment into heads of public media institutions in many African countries is subject to interference by government and could not guarantee independence of the media. He also noted that the refusal by the FRCN to allow the NLC a voice amounts to censorship.

Mr. Elliott took exception to the remark, which he considered racist. He posed the questions: for emerging democracies and societies just moving out of war, should we allow all voices in public media? Shouldn't we block some voices that appear violent?

Mr. Iroh, while supporting Mr. Elliott's views, wondered why there is so much fear about African governments having some level of oversight on what is put on air by public stations, which according to him generates from the notion that Africans are incapable of managing their affairs judiciously. He noted that an EU officer has a chair in the BBC office and vets whatever is to be put on air. He also referred to the D-Notice as practiced in Britain as examples of western government censorship of the media.

The tempers that rose were brought under control when the session was declared closed.
In his paper on *The Challenges of Public Service Broadcasting in a Democratic and Pluralistic Federal Nigeria*, Prof. E. O. Edeani of the Department of Mass Communication, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Nigeria, traced the history of the broadcast media in the country. He noted that while the federal government controls national television and radio networks, virtually all the states of the federation have their broadcasting outfits, each with their individual objectives.

Despite this limited pluralism, their performance in giving true public service broadcasting, he said, is less than appreciable. He identified some of the problems confronting public broadcasters in Nigeria to include political interference, limited funding and the attendant hunt for supplementary funds, technical problems, professional immaturity and linguistic heterogeneity.

One question to which no one could provide an appropriate answer and for which many would have liked Mallam Daladi Bako, NBC DG, who was slated to be present, to respond to, was posed by Professor Karikari. He asked: "What is the attitude of the NBC over state-owned stations, especially states that have adopted Sharia (the Islamic legal code) with its clearly anti-free expression and press freedom ingredients?"

In his paper, *Policy, Legal and Constitutional Framework and their Implications for the Editorial Independence on Public Service Broadcasting (a focus on Francophone West Africa)*, Gabriel Ayite Baglo, Media for Democracy Programme, and coordinator IFJ/WAJA offices in Senegal, observed that the constitutional, legal enactments and the political contexts vary from one country to another.

Nevertheless, he said there exist similar experiences. He identified Senegal, Benin and Mali as contexts in which on-going reforms have made more progress than those of other countries in the sub-region. He singled out Benin as having been most pragmatic in the liberalization of its airwaves and the control of public broadcast institutions. The autonomy he said has brought some editorial independence as well some problems such as funding.

On day two, Mr. Barker presented the paper, *Experiences and Lessons of Public Service Broadcast Reforms and Restructuring in Southern Africa* written by Dr. Tawana Kupe of School of Languages and Literature Studies, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. Mr. Iroh chaired the session.

Presenting a paper titled: *Current and Future Challenges of Financing Public Service Broadcasting in West Africa*, Mr. Berifi Appenteng, Managing Director, Graphic Communications Group, Ghana, noted that with the liberalization of the sector, and dwindling government subvention to public broadcast institutions, many are increasingly forced to engage in more commercial broadcasting especially in the face of insignificant advertising revenue and TV/Radio license fees.

The implication of this, he said, is that many public broadcast institutions will soon be forced to propagate the oft-narrow commercial or corporate objectives of advertisers. In fact he said there is already a noticeable rise in the influence of advertisers on programme content and schedule on many public broadcast media.

To him, a way out is emphasis on TV/Radio license fees. But given the problem associated with collection, he suggested that each country should consider setting up a commission to facilitate the collection and distribution.

The conference subsequently broke into two working groups. One group was saddled with the responsibility of knocking out a model of an appropriate legislation/regulatory framework for an advocacy action in the sub-region and as well editorial independence/responsibility. The other group looked at the problems of programming/local content and financing public service broadcasting with all the associated issues.

At the end of deliberations, a number of resolutions emerged which were ratified by the participants at a plenary *(see below)*.
Recommendations of the Conference on Public Broadcasting in W/Africa

From the 16th to 18th September 2002, a conference on Public Service Broadcasting in West Africa was held under the auspices of the Article 19 and the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) in Accra, Ghana.

Participants included Heads of Public Service Broadcasting Organisations, Head of Regulatory Bodies, regional media organizations and other regional stakeholders. The meeting deliberated on the need for reform of public service broadcasting in the West Africa sub region to reflect and sustain the new democratic dispensation and to allow popular participation in public affairs.

The major challenges facing public service broadcasting organizations were highlighted, and participants examined and identified priority actions to be taken collectively to address them.

Participants reiterated the critical role of public service broadcasting in society especially as a means of fostering unity and cultural identity as well as ensuring access to information to all sectors of society.

Participants agreed on the following:

**Status and Mandate of Public Service Broadcasting Organization**

The status and mandate of Public Service Broadcasting Organizations should be provided by a legislation which states and defines the mandate, powers, responsibilities, modalities of appointments, funding sources and accountability mechanisms.

Public broadcasters should provide balanced, accurate and relevant information, and programmes to the public and should strive to reflect the peoples' voice.

**Independence of Regulatory Bodies**

The independence of regulatory bodies should be guaranteed by law and respected in practice.

Appointment of Members should be made by organizations reflecting a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

The process for appointing members should be set out clearly in law. Members should serve in their individual capacity and exercise their functions at all times and in the public interest.

**Editorial Independence of Public Service Broadcasting Organisations**

The principle of editorial independence, whereby programming decisions are made by broadcasters on the basis of professional criteria and the public's right to know, should be guaranteed by law and respected in practice. It should be up to broadcasters, not the government, regulatory bodies nor commercial entities, to make decisions about what to broadcast.

**Access to Public Service Broadcasting**

Public Service Broadcasters have an obligation to ensure that the public receive adequate, unbiased information, particularly, during elections.

**Programming**

Public Service Broadcasting Organizations should endeavour to reflect cultural, religions and language diversities of their communities. The use of foreign originated programs should not conflict with national values and culture and should not discourage the production of local content.

**Financing**

There is the need for continuous state-funding of Public Service Broadcasting. However, the Public Service Broadcasting organizations should explore other sources of funding such as Special Trust Funds and effective collection of licensing fees.

**Co-operation and Co-production**

Co-operation and co-production of broadcast material should be encouraged among Public Service Broadcasting organizations in the sub-region under mutually beneficial and proper contractual framework.

Media Foundation for West Africa and ARTICLE 19 are encouraged to assist in conducting a comprehensive audit of Public Service Broadcasting facilities in the sub-region.

Media Foundation for West Africa and ARTICLE 19 are further encouraged to facilitate the establishment of a Union of West African Public Broadcasting Institutions. To this end,
MFWA and ARTICLE 19 should consider convening a follow-up conference to work out the modalities.

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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:

a. to promote respect and recognition for press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria;

b. to provide protection and support for journalists and writers engaged in the lawful pursuit of their professional duties;

c. to promote the highest standards of professional ethics, integrity, training and conduct in the journalism profession; and

d. 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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Be Warned, FG Tells Foreign Media

The Federal government has accused foreign media of reporting only negative events about the country rather than focus on developmental events. It, therefore, urged them to desist from the practice, as it is capable of wrecking the nation's budding democracy.

Prof. Jerry Gana, Minister of Information and National Orientation who made the accusation while receiving Barry Langridge, BBC's Head of Africa and Middle East Region, during a courtesy call, appealed to him to be fair and balanced in its report on Nigeria. Prof. Gana noted that the Hausa service of the BBC was very widely received and listened to and as such any negative report on it was capable of undermining the nation's democracy. He reminded Langridge that democracy is young in the country adding that government was making every effort to sustain it.

Prof. Gana said negative reports on Nigeria would be totally unacceptable and urged the BBC to give accurate and clear information about events in Nigeria.

Also at the office of the Senate President, Langridge received similar umbrage from Anyim Pius Anyim who also accused the BBC of a 'penchant for reporting only negative events in Nigeria.' The Senate President said such reports could spark off political crisis as well as dent the country's image before international investors.

Mr. Langridge revealed that he was in the country to monitor views and comments by Nigerians about BBC programmes with a view to determining areas that need fine-tuning. In what appeared to be a defence, Mr. Langridge said that they at BBC, "are sticking absolutely with our guidelines." He added that BBC reports negative events because such events dominate happenings in Nigeria just as they do in the entire developing world.

The views by Prof. Gana and Senate President Anyim appeared to be shared by Senate Chairman on Information Committee, Jonathan Zwingina, and Mr. Taiwo Alimi, Director General of the Voice of Nigeria.

Senator Zwingina on August 9 asked the BBC to combine reports of developmental efforts with negative ones rather than highlighting the latter alone.

Mr. Alimi, on August 7 accused the BBC and Voice of America (VOA) of taking joy in reporting conflict in the third world while they run short of news in times of relative peace. He made the remark in Abuja at an interactive session of some media stakeholders including VON management, its stringers, and listeners from across the country.

Tempers rose between the federal government and foreign media in Nigeria in February following Jerry Koinange, CNN Correspondent's, report that a quarter of Nigerians preferred military rule. The report followed the anger expressed by some Nigerians over the apparent failure of the
government to deal decisively with the fall-out of the January 27 Ikeja Cantonment Bomb tragedy that led to the death of over one thousand people and the ethnic clash at Idi-Araba area of Lagos.

While effort were afoot to douse the resultant ill feelings between the government and foreign correspondents, another journalist, Stephen Faris of *Time International* magazine also wrote a piece accusing officers of the ministry of information of attempting to bribe foreign correspondents during a meeting with the minister.

The ministry, however, explained that the money given to the correspondents was a refund of their transport, feeding and accommodation expenses, which it said was indicated in the invitation and is a common practice by his ministry to journalists who honour its invitation.

The government later gave the ministry a clean bill of health and threatened to prosecute any foreign journalist who reported "false" information about Nigeria.

**BBC, German Radio Donate to VON**

The Voice of Nigeria (VON) recently received various broadcast facilities worth several millions of naira from the Deutsche Welle Radio of Germany (DW) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service with the support of the European Commission (EC).

In addition, the BBC World Service has offered a training programme for VON staff in internet/web design and precision On-line journalism in London with another four-week attachment for a VON programme producer at the BBC office in London.

A statement signed by VON's special assistant to the Director-General, Tope Idowu, listed the broadcast facilities donated by DW as a satellite intelsat 707 including a satellite dish with antenna, six pieces of integrated receiver decoder, six surge protectors and one automatic voltage regulator. Already, all the facilities have been installed in the VON office in Lagos.

The BBC World Service in collaboration with the EU, donated six Sony mini disc recorders, six microphones, fifteen mini disc, two stopwatches, one stabilizer and one UPS. Other items donated are Multi-Choice DSTV satellite dish, journalism training books and softwares. The donated broadcast facilities by the BBC are expected to be used by students and participants at the VON Training Centre at Ikorodu in Lagos state. The offer of training for VON staff was reiterated by the Head of the BBC World Service, Mr. Barry Langridge during a visit to the Director-General of VON, Mr. Taiwo Allimi in Abuja recently.

**Nobody Dictates to Me - Eddie Iroh**

The name Eddie Iroh may not be a household name for many Nigerians who follow the media religiously, but among media circle, he is definitely not a pushover. He is indeed one of the brightest journalists post-independent Nigeria media has been blessed with. He has combined the advantage of working on both sides of the divide; the developed and developing worlds.

From his base in London, where he was publishing a magazine, Chic, President Olusegun Obasanjo invited him to head the public funded Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), easily Africa's largest radio network. To many, the appointment was a case of a round peg in a round hole. And he has eminently soldiered on. But not without controversies, especially as the next round of elections draws near.

He spoke to Osaro Odemwingie in far away Accra, Ghana, on a wide range of issues.

Excerpts:

*It has been 3 years since you assumed office as the D.G of FRCN. How would you access your performance so far?*

I would like to access it from the point of view of public reaction; reaction by both people in the government and outside, people in the executive and in the National Assembly. But more importantly, the reactions of poor average Nigerians. Because they are our employers. These are the people who pay our wages and what I'm saying now is perhaps my most important achievement, letting the broadcasters realise that the Nigerian public is the paymaster, not the
federal government, whether it is the National Assembly or the executive. What they do in terms of funding they do on behalf of the Nigerian taxpayers. So perhaps in answering these questions, I have touched on what is clearly in my view the most important achievement of the past three years; to re-focus, to re-direct the perception of the perception of responsibility on the part of broadcaster.

When I came in, we were still suffering from the military syndrome of "He said He Said", of journalism by Press release, journalism of "His Masters Voice" and that was the first thing I tackled when I came in. To re-focus, to re-orientate and to demilitarise the mind of the Nigerian public broadcaster in Radio Nigeria. So beginning from there, because we could have all the facilities, all the equipment and all the Hi-tech apparatus of the 21st and still not be able to satisfy the Nigerian listener. So the technical achievement we can do that with money, the acquisition of new equipment we can do that with money, but to be able to redirect our attention, our focus to the point that people no longer assume that Radio Nigeria was simply parroting what the government has said is a tremendous achievement and I'm proud of it. It is a re-definition of the philosophy of Radio Nigeria. That is the most important thing we achieved.

What has been your greatest challenge in all of these three years while you strove to achieve all that you have achieved?

Yes, I go back to this re-focusing. You know change is always difficult. To bring about change you have to carry people along, and sometimes they do it most reluctantly; kicking and screaming. Even as I speak, I still find it necessary to refresh the attention of our reporters and editors on what our primary responsibilities are. Just before I left for this conference, I sent a memorandum to the director of news pointing out flaws in our reporting of the Senate pardoning itself. I found it preposterous, I found it cynical for the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to wake up and say we have pardoned people who were found to be criminally culpable by the same Senate and the motion to pardon them was moved by one of those who was held primarily responsible for this wrong doings, and we just reported it without questions. And I had to go back... because I was not around on Monday when we had our editorial meeting to say look this is not journalism. Radio Nigeria must ask questions, must probe, must go further than just reporting. And that is an on-going exercise, it is an on-going effort. So the most difficult challenge has been to re-orientate people both in-terms of perception and in-terms of ability. There are those who have the right perception but do not have the ability to carry a report beyond reporting, to carry a report to the point of furthering inquiry and there are those who have the skill but don't have the inclination because they have been too long in the journalism of press releases.

Could you also look at the challenges in terms of the human development, training and retraining facilities and all that?

You train those who are trainable. Again you can be trained and still not make the transition from docile journalism to activist journalism, from docile broadcasting to, if you like, aggressive broadcasting. It is a function of the individual ability as well as strength. The nation, not just broadcasting, has a serious skill crisis. It is a long time consequence of breakdown in our educational system and we are beginning to reap the result. There are not enough capable, talented people to match the fast development of the broadcast medium in Nigeria. I mean we are building 32 new F.M stations, N.T.A is building 67 new stations, 17 or so private license were awarded 2 to 3 months ago, all these add to an extension of the hardware, the infrastructure. But what about the software, the human element, the ideas that make good programs? I do not think there are enough people. It is not just a function of brain, it is also a function of having the flair, having the talent. It is not everybody who goes to Mass Communication class, has a mass communication degree, that would make a journalist. My experience is that most time they don't.

Still talking about challenges, another election approaches in Nigeria. You are in charge of a public funded media and you know that we have had this history of public funded media being somehow uncritically supportive of governments, especially during election. What is your organisation doing to ensure that it does not fall into the same circle of sycophancy?
I'm aware, in fact I was a witness to a role, sometimes not very proud role, of electronic media especially the T.V and Radio in previous Nigerian democratic election. I remembered 'Verdict 79' and a similar one in 1983. What I don't seem to see in Nigeria is an awareness on the part of those who ask this sort of question you ask, because if there is an awareness, they would have known that Radio Nigeria even before the NBC, even before anybody else, set up a panel in May at our Central Management Committee meeting in Owerri, to produced a guideline, not just exclusively for the election, but for all times. We distributed it to the NBC, to the Ministry and to political parties' leaders, to comment and to refer back to us so that by the time it is complete, we would have taken into account every conceivable point of view. But some people do not know that. You see, people remember when we fail, but when we succeed, when we make effort, the process that leads to it, nobody seems to notice.

It is not a matter of what effort are we making, or what measures are we taking. It is a question of what measures we have taken. This guide book is a compendium of the NBC code, the law setting up the FRCN, the constitutional provisions on media and the INEC law, all the statute of the federation, regulations and decrees, if you like, form the body of the guidelines we have put together, adapted it to modern times and we will launch it properly. We are going to print it, not only that, we are going to run a special workshop for our reporters to derive from this guidebook as well as corporate experience of running elections. We know that one mistake from Radio Nigeria can torpedo the whole electoral process and we are absolutely determined and committed to avoiding that and I think the voter's registration has given us an opportunity to do a dry run, to do a rehearsal of what the election would be like.

We have invested in modern recording equipment like minidisks so that the reports will be clear, there will be no room for misinformation and for inaccuracy. That, as I said, is the nightmare of Nigerian broadcasting. When we are right, nobody remembers, when we are wrong, nobody forgets.

*Can you explain why the FRCN blacked-out the NLC strike in January 2002. Was that not a case of self-censorship?*

Not an example of self-censorship. We are not censoring ourselves … we were being proactive for a change. This idea that radio should be there just to report is not in accord with my understanding of an institution funded by the public. It ought to ask questions on behalf of the public, it ought as fairly accurately as possible reflect the public mood, ask the questions that the lady in the market place in the village does not have the opportunity to ask. If we were able to ask that question as close as possible to her own sensitivity, then we are doing the right thing. So we are not doing self-censorship. We were simply recognising what we considered, taking into account what we considered to be in the interest of the country in terms of its stability, in terms of its peace, in terms of harmony, at a time of many other political and economic problems.

We felt that to call a strike at that time is to push the country over the edge. It is not self-censorship it is common sense. And the fact that radio Nigeria did not support, … now we did not just say we would not support, pretending that the strike wasn't there… we said that we cannot give the oxygen of publicity to an effort, which we believed could torpedo our country. In issues and matters relating to Nigeria, Radio Nigeria, under me, cannot be neutral. In issues that affect the stability, the future of Nigeria, we cannot be neutral. We cannot be journalists in the middle; we report this, we report that and we stand back. No. We must use this mamoth establishment for the public good and to the best of our understanding of what the public good is. And that is what we did. I said so, I wrote, if you like call it an editorial, I wrote a commentary which explained our position and I'm satisfied that our lack of support for the NLC strike led to its quick collapse. But then again, back to what I said earlier, when we are wrong, everybody remembers, when we are right everybody forgets.

A month ago, when NLC very sensible decided not to go on strike over the 25% wage increase, we did an editorial, we supported them we said we called their action magnanimous, we called them statemanly, we gave it all the accolades. And the President of the Federal Republic of
Nigeria used our editorial, our commentary, as an example of maturity on the part of NLC. So everybody remembers that we did not support the strike, nobody remembers that we applauded them when they, very sensibly decided not to go on strike over wage increase. We are really a balanced group. We are playing an objective role. I have no interest in supporting a particular group for the other, I have an interest in supporting the Federal Republic of Nigeria, that is the ordinary Nigerian that make up the Federal Republic. It is not government, or NLC or Judiciary and Legislature, it is the ordinary person in the village. I know tax payment in Nigeria is not very efficient, but he is a taxpayer. If you are using oil money to fund us, it is the oil money that belongs to that woman or man in the village, and it is his interest we are concerned with.

In a public broadcast environment, everybody is equal, the government, the ordinary person, civil society, military, everybody is equal and everybody should have equal access. I think that is what we are trying to, and that is what we have tried to do. But we must remember our actions not one action.

**It has been in the news that you are a member of President Obasanjo's Re-election Campaign Team. How true is that?**

God forbid. What you just said is abhorrent, not just to me but even to the government. I cannot imagine President Obasanjo or Jerry Gana asking that Edie Iroh should be a member of President Obasanjo’s election committee at the same time that I hold the media responsibility for enhancing a free and fair election. If anybody told you that, why don't you pick the telephone and say I know Mr. Edie Iroh, he was my boss in *The Guardian* let me ask him. You didn't do that, you come to an international conference and state something that is absolutely untrue. If you prove to me that I'm a member of the president's re-election committee, that I have been nominated, that I have accepted, that there is any document saying so, I would resign my position as DG of FRCN within 24 hours.

**Although you have very well categorically denied being a member, if I may ask, were you at any time ever nominated to be a member?**

No. That is what I said to you in my earlier answer. If you show me proof that I was nominated, that I accepted, that it was written down, that I was contacted, that I was informed in any shape or form, I will resign because it will be incompatible with my position as the Director General of FRCN.

**While I would not want you to hold brief for others, if it happens that other public office holders in your category are members of this committee, what would you say?**

If you don't hold brief for them why should I hold brief for them? Look, let me tell you something I can say as categorical as my earlier denial: President Obasanjo has done more for press freedom than any Nigerian leader in my experience. And I have lived through all Nigerian leaders; civilian or military. I run Africa’s largest radio station and nobody has ever said to me; say it in this way or the other way. Yet one broadcast from radio Nigeria can bring 2 million people into any public square. That is how effective we are. But I have not been asked, I have not been approached, I've not been interfered with. I've always said to people that the government has created an environment that enabled us to be as free as we are. If we make a mistake it is my responsibility not that of the government.

**Let us take a look at the procedure for appointment of officers’ into headship of public funded media. As things stand now, the president makes the appointment, of course based on the recommendation of the Minister of Information. It does not allow for some other bodies within the Nigerian society to inpute into this process as a form of check and balance. That is a point some of us are not quite comfortable with.**

Okay, how would you rather they were appointed? The justices of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Judicial Services? So if the President can appoint judges, why can't they appoint media chief executives. I believe the
judiciary, as the third Estate of the Realm, is extremely important. We have not quarrel with the President appointing the judges of the Supreme Court in this country, but we quarrel with him appointing media chief executives. We have no quarrels with the President and state governors appointing politicians to the board of broadcast organisations, which is what they are, political compensation, but we have problem with appointing qualified professionals to head... I don't know what the problem is all about.

There is a distinction here. In the case of the judges you have a commission that makes the recommendation…

The minister makes the recommendation in the case of the media organisations.

There is clearly a difference between a commission that is made up of many persons who obviously shares different views and one minister. So isn't this a significant departure from the order?

No it is not. Because the minute you begin to have too many interests … I can tell you… in Romania, the chief executive is appointed by the National Assembly. But he is always running back and fort to the National Assembly. Two weeks after I signed a contract with him on international cooperation, they removed him because he does not have tenure. His tenure is at the whims of the politicians at the National Assembly. You have to find a better method, it is not just enough to criticize the existing method, you have to find a better method. Because if the President appoints, who do you want to have inpute? The National Assembly, the judiciary, civil service commission or NUJ (Nigeria Union of Journalists) or NBC (National Broadcasting commission) or BON (Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria)? There is no end to those who can make inpute.

But I would have thought that because the appointments are publicly announced the appointee is subjected to public scrutiny. And I remember when I was appointed, I was not in Nigeria, I was living abroad. I was amazed by the amount of good will, people saying that this is a good appointment. So I think that kind of public scrutiny is sufficient inpute into the choice of chief executives. Here again, why not the chief executive of Nigeria Railway Corporation, Nigeria Airways or NNPC, why only the broadcast media?

We are talking about the media here …

The proceeding is the same with all federal parastatals. The minister nominates the presidents confirms.

Lets take the South African situation where the authorities advertise and people send in nominations and then the list is published. Citizens then have the opportunity to have a look and when anybody feels that there is anybody among them who shouldn't for whatever reason be there you will speak up. Is that not a better process of allowing people to make input as opposed to what obtains in Nigeria where you just make the announcement and then it is impossible to recall?

I get the point you are making, and I follow the appointment of the chief executive of SABC who happens to be my friend, Peter Maclarry. But the governing council that made the advertisement and the appointment is a highly political and politicised body which represent the political party of the day. Really, whichever way you look at it, if the ANC does not want the chief executive of the SABC, he won't be there. That is the way it works. It does not matter how you look at it. It has to be someone they are comfortable with.

Whereas in our own case, the minute you are appointed, if you have the professional gut, you can actually go out and be as independent as you want to be. Mr. President appointed me and he has never interfered. The only day he called me in matters relating to broadcasting is to ask "what are you doing about educational broadcasting, distance learning, let me have the policy you people have about distance learning, because education broadcasting is an issue that is close to my heart. That is all. In fact, he is known to be actively encouraging the expansion of coverage, the all-inclusiveness of our activities, even parties that have not been registered. At the end of the day,
the point I'm making is that it depends on the person appointed, not the process of appointment. After all, judges even though they are appointed by the President, the minute they are appointed and sworn-in, they are on their own. But what we should be looking for is not how, but having been appointed we have to provide standards to protect the chief executives from pressure; pressure due to funding, pressure due to tenure. If you are appointing a chief executive and you say he has four years, during which unless he commits a heinous crime, he cannot be removed due to purely political reasons and then a system of funding that minimises government subsidy, if you have sufficient resources and security of tenure, then you have no reason not to go out and serve the interest of all Nigerians rather than either the person who appointed you or the political party he is in. At the end of the day, the man who is heading BBC today, Mr. Greg Dike, was a card-carrying member of the Labour Party. Mr. Greg Dike was a fund-raiser for the Labour Party and he is the DG of BBC and nobody has faulted his performance on political grounds. The thing is that we are exceedingly suspicious of the intentions of even the most honorable people.

*I'll come back to funding later. When you were talking earlier you referred to the additional stations that FRCN is setting up as Community Radio. From what I know of it, it is quite in contrast with my understanding of Community Radio. Could you elucidate?*

I don't know what your idea of community radio is, but we are building FM stations located in each state catering to the catchment areas of the state. Rather than broadcasting to people who speak Fulani, the Fulfulde, in Kaduna, we want to broadcast to them from say Sokoto and their language would be in the basic menu of program; of news, of commentary etc. And other contiguous languages will similarly be addressed and there would be a link directly between them and radio station, not the distant top-down method, rather down-top, grassroots.

*My knowledge of community radio broadcasting is a broadcast outfit owned and managed by the people and who have influence over programs and programming and all that.*

I'm familiar with that concept. But is there any community in Nigeria that can build, own and run a radio station.

*Have we tried it?*

There is no use in trying if you are going to fail.

*That is a fatal assumption. We have in Republic of Benin for instance where the issue of community broadcasting…*

*(cuts in) Built by the people as a cooperative operated by them? That is untrue.*

*It is obtained.*

Well I suppose I will have to find out the truth in that. It is like saying why don't we have provincial newspapers in Nigeria? Why does every newspaper want to be a national newspaper? Why don't we have an Efik language newspaper in Akwa Ibom, or Calabar that will cater for the Efiks, owned by the Efiks and drawing its commercial revenue from the community. First of all you won't even get started. You have to look at the society. Which society in Nigeria can build a radio station, operate it and generate enough resources to run it? Tell me. The nearest we can get to that is the FM broadcasting built by the government but put at the service of the people. A large number of people who work there will be drawn from the community, the programs will be derived from the community, the issues and question will be drawn largely from the community. And I think that is the best option in this circumstance, rather than saying we encourage communities to build... even Local government with the entire subvention they get from the federal government they cannot build or sustain radio station. The manpower, the requirements of skill, of ideas, of resource, I don't think they can.

*How comfortable are you with government funding?*

Comfortable is not the word. I'm comfortable as long as government recognises that the money is not their money but the money of the Nigerian tax payer. So to that extent I am...
comfortable. But what is worrying is that there cannot be enough public resources to fund an expanded radio and television. There is no question about that. As we are speaking now, we get 5million Naira less every month to pay our wages. The budget is there, it is fully provided for in the budget, it is fully approved but we are consistently under funded to the tune of 5million Naira. The idea is that we should generate the other 5million Naira from our commercial activities. Very often, it is very difficult. The economy is not buoyant, even if it is that buoyant, there are far too many radio stations, far too many private and public stations looking for the same advertising, shopping in the same supermarket. So I'm part of a team that is looking for other more reliable ways of funding broadcasting. In fact, not just broadcasting but all government-owned media.

As a way of ensuring sustainable future and also ensuring a far more independent existence the Mass Media Trust Fund is an idea whose time has come. We have not fully exploited it and, therefore, we don't know what its potentials are. But it seems to me, in the long term, that it is the only solution to building and abandoning. Because if government were to decide that for every electronic, radio, television, communicating equipment coming into this country, half % or 1% or 2% of the tax on it should go to the mass Media Trust Fund, that would be one way of looking at it. I do not believe that the public should be taxed either by way of radio license or by way of indirect tax or some other tax, because what I have talked about regarding duties could be seen as some kind of indirect tax, but I do not believe, again that radio license will work in Nigeria. Collectability is the fact. Who do you tax, how much do you tax, how do you collect? These are the issues. It is a huge logistic nightmare, which I think cannot be resolved in a matter of months.

So in the final analysis, there has to be an ingenious, innovative, imaginative, creative means of finding resources so that government will be less the pay master and independence of the media will be far more assured because whoever pays the piper feels an obligation to dictate the tune. This government may not be like that, but I am not going to guarantee the government of tomorrow.

Gbenga Obasanjo, Another, Sue Daily Trust, NNN

Dr. Gbenga Obasanjo, son of President Olusegun Obasanjo has sued Media Trust Nigeria Ltd., publishers of Daily Trust newspapers at an Ibadan High Court for alleged libel. He sued the newspaper over the content of an article published in the paper's edition of August 12, 2002, entitled Mr. President Sir, Your Time is up. Dr. Obasanjo is demanding from the newspaper the sum of N10 Billion as damages. He is also seeking an interim injunction restraining the newspapers from further publishing the said article. Joined in the suit as defendants are Sam Ndah-Isaiah, author of the article and Ishaq Modibo Kawu, the newspaper's editor.

Chief Afe Babalola, Counsel to Dr. Obasanjo contended that his client's reputation and character had been disparaged and rubbed before the general public as it referred to him as a looter, thief and rogue.

Dr. Obasanjo claimed in his suit that the article claimed that President Obasanjo, often in his numerous travels, passes him off as a top businessman; that he has unduly and unethically benefited from numerous government contracts; and that he would serve jail term after 2003 because of the retributive justice that would be visited on him for his father's unjustifiable imprisonment of Mohammed Abacha, son of former military ruler, the late Gen. Sani Abacha. The said article claim that Mohammed is in jail for being the son of his father.

The article listed some contracts in which it claims Gbenga is involved. These include: multi-billion dollar continuous fuel importation and the National Identity Card Project. The article further alleged that Dr. Obasanjo is working, in collaboration with some other persons, to buy the Nigerian Security Mint and Printing Company which government has slated for privatisation.

Dr. Obasanjo in his statement of claims said that the words, by their natural and ordinary meaning, amongst others meant that he has elevated the position of "first son" into a conduit pipe
for draining Nigeria's resources for personal gains; that he is a contractor who feed on government contracts obtained through the corrupt influences of his father. He believed that the defendants "published the words … out of malevolence or spite towards the plaintiff in his personal capacity."

Chief Babalola described his client as a medical doctor who holds a Ph.D. degree in Epidemiology and gainfully employed in Harvard University. He appealed to the court to restrain the defendants by themselves, their agents, privies, servants or any person from further printing or causing to be published again, the said article. Justice Olu Ariwoola of the High Court granted the interim injunction restraining the paper from further printing or publishing the said story.

Motion on notice was adjourned till September 17, 2002.

In another case, Mr. Godwin Dabo Adzuana, the Assistant National Auditor of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) also sued Daily Trust and New Nigerian newspapers for libel. He is claiming N100 million as damages for libel and injurious falsehood allegedly published in Daily Trust edition of August 14, 2002.

The suit filed at an Abuja High Court is also seeking a perpetual injunction restraining the defendants, their agents, servants and privies from further publishing any such "defamatory" statements as to injure or adversely affect him. He is also demanding that the newspapers to retract the statement as well as tender a public apology to him.

The suit was filed against Senate President, Anyim Pius Anyim with New Nigerian newspapers; its editor, Mr. Muhammed Jega; Daily Trust newspapers, Ishaq Modibo Kawu, Mr. Jibril Daudu and Mr. Auwalu S. Mu'azu all of Daily Trust newspapers.

Mr. Dabo's complaint is the news story on page two of Daily Trust newspaper of August 14 titled My Life is in Danger, says Anyim. Mr. Anyim was reported to have said, among other things, that Mr. Dabo is at the head of a committee set up to dent his reputation and get him impeached.

NPAN Seeks Resuscitation of Newsprint Firm

Faced with increasing cost of input, publishers, under the auspices of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), are pushing for the resuscitation of the nation's comatose newsprint company at Oku-Iboku, Akwa Ibom State.

Their fresh push is coming amidst reports that they (publishers) and other users are spending close to $500 million yearly on the importation of paper and newsprint items.

According to NPAN's President and Chief Executive Officer of Newswatch Communications Limited, publishers of Newswatch magazine, Mr. Ray Ekpu, the association's foremost strategy to conserve the nation's scarce foreign exchange is to ensure the immediate revival of the Oku-Iboku factory.

The revival of the factory would act as a stop-gap measure, while NPAN, he said, shortly after the association's one-day meeting in Port-Harcourt, would push for the company's privatisation. He added that such a programme would ensure efficient management of the factory.

In a communiqué at the end of the meeting, NPAN decried what it described as multiple taxation at the various levels of government on paper manufacturing companies, including its members, saying such taxes contributed to the collapse of the companies.

Freedom House focus on Nigeria

Freedom House, an America non-profit organization founded in 1941 for the purpose of promoting and defending democracy and freedom worldwide, is set to begin a major intervention in the Nigerian media. The organisation which carries out its activities through exchanges, grant-giving programs, direct technical assistance and network development, is set to sponsor ten Nigerian journalists on a training tour of the United States of America. The program
will enable the ten Nigerian journalists to work with their counterparts in the US and be equipped with prerequisite skills in investigative journalism and an overview of the U.S. government, media, and non-governmental sectors.

According to Jennifer Whatley, senior program officer, and Karin Deutsch Karlenkar, senior researcher at Freedom House, in an interview with *Media Rights Monitor*, the training is the first leg of a much larger training that will be held in Nigeria and which will benefit over 100 Nigerian journalists. Follow-on workshops will draw on expertise from returnee Visiting Fellows.

The trip for the ten Nigerian journalists is being undertaken as part of the organisation's 2003 Visiting Fellows Program. Selected candidates will participate in program sessions beginning January 2003 or May 2003.

According to the organisation's officials, the six-week program also includes a four-week assignment with a U.S. media organization.

Freedom House has an established record of assistance to governments, NGOs, and media throughout the world. In addition, its publications, such as the Annual Survey of Press Freedom and Free Expression assess press freedom, political rights, and civil liberties in many countries around the world.

**Nigeria Ranks as Partially Free - Freedom House**

*What is your business in Nigeria?*

**Jennifer Whatley:** As you know, our organisation, Freedom House, works to promote democracy and free expression. We are here to see how Nigerians can benefit from our activities. We are exploring ways to collaborate with NGOs and journalists in order to strengthen the media in Nigeria to be able to promote democracy in the country.

*I assume that this effort by your organisation is as a result of some findings on the state of the media in Nigeria which suggest the necessity of this intervention. What are your views on the current state of the media in Nigeria?*

**Jennifer Whatley:** Perhaps this is a good time for me to introduce my colleague who is more familiar with the situation on the grounds. She is based in our office in New York and actually writes our Global Media Survey ([she beacons on Karin Deutsch Karlenkar](#)).

**Karin Karlenkar:** I am the managing editor of our annual press freedom survey which reviews the media situation around the world on an annual basis. Nigeria ranks as Partially Free on our survey. Every year, we sort of look at the major trend affecting the media in various countries. In Nigeria, although there has been a lot of improvement since the termination of military rule, there are still a lot of influences in terms of the legal environment where you have obnoxious laws still in the statute books and also there are political and economic pressures on the media.

*Your activities have taken you to many other African countries. How would you compare the media environment in those countries to what obtains in Nigeria?*

**Karin Karlenkar:** From our activities, the media environment in many African countries are pretty much the same, especially the economy. But on a broader level, one can say some countries are partially free. So Nigeria ranks like many African countries. But in terms of the changes in the media environment in Africa as a result of the changing political climate; such as changes in government such as happened in Ghana that has really affected the media situation in that country; usually the situation doesn't change much for many African countries. Another African country which ranks very well is Mail.

*Besides the legal framework and political pressure which you have as a basis for measuring the level of freedom of the media in various countries, what other issues are involved?*

**Karin Karlenkar:** As at last year, we started this framework which uses three-part approach. These include the legal framework, political and economic pressures. We look at prices of say newsprint and the amount at which citizens can buy a newspaper. We also look at media
ownership and how they might affect what is written and carried by newspapers. We also look at whether journalists have to accept bribes to write stories. There are many other economic problems which have great impact on the freedom and independence of the media.

Based on your experience on media issues across various countries, how do you think the stakeholders in the Nigerian media can manage the process of bringing about an improvement in the media environment in the country?

Karin Karlenkar: Well, in many countries, the economic problems are pretty difficult to address because it may be a problem of economic development which NGOs cannot address. I think NGOs in other countries might have recorded more successes in influencing the legal framework. Many are also now trying to promote the freedom of information act which is trying to get rid of bad legislation. This is more prominent in Latin American countries. One of the other issues is whether libel should be defined as a criminal offence. So in other countries, people are trying to decriminalize libel so that people who write have more freedom to do so.

What has been the level of responses of Nigeria journalists to your activities and to what extent has the media in Nigeria in general benefited from your activities? This becomes significant given the hugeness of the country and the sheer number of journalists in Nigeria.

Karin Karlenkar: We actually have not had many Nigerian journalists benefiting from our activities. But we are hoping to change that at the moment and that is one of the problem that this current project seeks to address. But it should also be noted that the amount of funding available to us for interventions in Africa has been very low. But we hope in future that we shall have more funding for our activities in Africa in the years ahead.

MRA Relocates

Media Rights Agenda (MRA) wishes to inform the general public especially our colleagues in media, individuals and other Non-Governmental Organisations that it has moved offices.

MRA's address has therefore changed from:

44, Alhaja Kofoworola Crescent
Off Obafemi Awolowo Way
Ikeja.

to

No. 10 Agboola Aina Street
(End of John Olugbo Street)
Off Amore Street
Off Toyin Street
Ikeja

Our post office box remains:

P. O. Box 52113
Ikoyi
Lagos
Nigeria

Our telephone numbers also remain as:
Governor Sacks Radio Management Inaugurates Interim Committee

The government of Imo State on September 2 dissolved the governing Board of Imo Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) and suspended indefinitely eight directors of the corporation. Mr. Ike Onyechere headed the dissolved governing Board while a director general, Ajie Chinedu Nzeribe, headed the suspended management team.

In place of the dissolved board, the government inaugurated a three-man Interim Management Committee (IMC) the following day. The IMC, headed by Mr. Osita Izunaso who is also the Executive Assistant on Publicity and Strategy for the state governor was given a three-month period within which to determine among others, how best to run the corporation.

The Commissioner of Information and Culture, Chief Finbarr Ochulor, stated that government took the step "because we want to re-orientate and restructure the place."

The Commissioner directed members of the board to handover all property of the corporation in their possession to the next senior staff in their respective departments.

The inauguration of the IMC was also followed by the institution of a three-man Administrative Panel of Inquiry headed by Chief Ben Ekedebe, to look into the professional and financial performance of IBC. It was given two weeks duration and five terms of reference.

IBC junior and middle cadre workers had recently returned from a strike action embarked upon to protest the non-payment of their five months salaries.

Code Of Ethics For Nigerian Journalists

PREAMBLE

Journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and every news medium to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. In the exercise of these duties, a journalist should always have a healthy regard for the public interest.

Trust is the cornerstone of journalism and every journalist should strive diligently to ascertain the truth of every event.

Conscious of the responsibilities and duties of journalists as purveyors of information, we, Nigerian journalists, give to ourselves this Code of Ethics. It is the duty of every journalist to observe its provisions.

1. EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE
   Decisions concerning the content of news should be the responsibility of a professional journalist.

2. ACCURACY AND FAIRNESS
   i. The public has a right to know. Factual, accurate, balanced and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence.
   ii. A journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information. Where such information has been inadvertently published, prompt correction should be made. A journalist must hold the right of reply as a cardinal rule of practice.
   iii. In the course of his duties a journalist should strive to separate facts from conjecture and comment.

3. PRIVACY
   As a general rule, a journalist should respect the privacy of individuals and their families unless it affects public interest.
A. Information on the private life of an individual or his family should only be published if it impinges on public interest.

B. Publishing of such information about an individual as mentioned above should be deemed justifiable only if it is directed at:
   i. Exposing crime or serious misdemeanour;
   ii. Exposing anti-social conduct;
   iii. Protecting public health, morality and safety;
   iv. Preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of the individual concerned.

4. PRIVILEGE / NON DISCLOSURE
   i. A journalist should observe the universally accepted principle of confidentiality and should not disclose the source of information obtained in confidence.
   ii. A journalist should not breach an agreement with a source of information obtained as “off-the-record” or as “background information.”

5. DECENCY
   i. A journalist should dress and comport himself in a manner that conforms with public taste.
   ii. A journalist should refrain from using offensive, abusive or vulgar language.
   iii. A journalist should not present lurid details, either in words or picture, of violence, sexual acts, abhorrent or horrid scenes.
   iv. In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries should be carried out and approaches made with sympathy and discretion.
   v. Unless it is in the furtherance of the public’s rights to know, a journalist should generally avoid identifying relatives or friends of person convicted or accused of crime.

6. DISCRIMINATION
   A journalist should refrain from making pejorative reference to a person’s ethnic group, religion, sex, or to any physical or mental illness or handicap.

7. REWARD AND GRATIFICATION
   i. A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information.
   ii. To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as a fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event.

8. VIOLENCE
   A journalist should not present or report acts of violence, armed robberies, terrorist activities or vulgar display of wealth in a manner that glories such acts in the eye of the public.

9. CHILDREN AND MINORS
   A journalist should not identify, either by name or picture, or interview children under the age of 16 who are involved in cases concerning sexual offences, crimes and rituals or witchcraft either as victims, witnesses or defendants.

10. ACCESS TO INFORMATION
    A journalist should strive to employ open and honest means in the gathering of information. Exceptional methods may be employed only when the public interest is at stake.

11. PUBLIC INTEREST
    A journalist should strive to enhance national unity and public good.

12. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
    A journalist should promote universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace and international understanding.

13. PLAGIARISM
    A journalist should not copy wholesales or in parts, other people’s work, without attribution and/or consent.
14. COPYRIGHT
i. Where a journalist reproduces a work, be it in print, broadcast, artwork or design, proper acknowledgement should be accorded the author.
ii. A journalist should abide by all rules of copyright, established by national and international laws and conventions.

15. PRESS FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY
A journalist should strive at all times to enhance press freedom and responsibility.

CPJ Urges African Union to Guarantee Press Freedom

The fledging African Union (AU) has been urged to guarantee press freedom. The charge was made by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The organisation made the call in an August 12 letter signed by Ann K. Cooper, CPJ's Executive Director, to African Union's Secretary General, Amara Essy.

CPJ, in the letter said it was concerned that the constitution of the new African Union (AU) does not protect the right to press freedom. “In fact, the language of this new constitution”, CPJ observed, “marks a significant setback for press freedom and freedom of expression in Africa, both of which were enshrined in the constitution of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the precursor to the AU.

“Such language is essential because journalists in Africa work under particularly hostile circumstances and, because of their important role in building and maintaining democracy, require recognition and protection”.

CPJ further observed that in several AU member states, journalists are arrested, harassed, and intimidated solely for their reporting, and many countries resort to harsh, outdated laws to prosecute journalists for their work. The organisation said its research shows an alarming pattern of governments interfering with the free flow of information and zealously prosecuting journalists for their work in some cases even drafting legislation deliberately aimed at suppressing the dissemination of dissenting views.

The letter cited the cases of the government of Eritrea which has shut down the entire independent media and has so far detained 14 journalists. Several others have fled the country. The Eritrean government accused the private press of purchasing publication licenses with funds from foreign governments hostile to Eritrea, and a special commission is drafting a new media policy to curb foreign funding of the press.

CPJ also cited the case of neighboring Ethiopia which also has a dismal press freedom record, and its government is planning alarming changes to the country's 10-year-old press laws that would severely restrict the rights of Ethiopia's already beleaguered private press corps. CPJ noted that although Information Minister Simon Bereket told its delegation that the new law would promote "constructive and responsible journalism," journalists however said the statutes would lead to a crackdown, driving many of them out of business or putting them behind bars. Currently, three journalists are in prison in Ethiopia.

Further, the letter cited the case of the parliament in The Gambia which recently passed the National Media Commission Bill 2002, that would restrict the press' ability to cover the news. The bill gives a state-appointed committee the right to license and register journalists (and to impose heavy fines and suspension for failing to do so), force reporters to reveal confidential sources, issue arrest warrants to journalists, and formulate a journalistic code of ethics.

By making registration mandatory, for example, this bill would give government authorities the power to decide who is and who is not a journalist. And by denying the right to confidentiality of sources, the bill would deprive journalists of one of their most essential tools for gathering information.

Lastly, CPJ recalled that it recently named Zimbabwe, once known for its vigorous and largely uncensored independent press, as one of the world's worst places to be a journalist.
Journalists in the country suffer under an arsenal of restrictive and punitive legislation, ranging from the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) to the Public Order and Security Act.

Both of these outlaw all criticism of President Robert Mugabe, and the AIPPA criminalizes the publication of "falsehoods" and grants the government the right to decide who may or may not work as a journalist in Zimbabwe. Fourteen journalists have been arrested and charged since March of this year, and police and pro-government vigilantes have attacked several journalists.

CPJ said while these countries are the most egregious press freedom violators in the AU, it has documented state harassment of independent reporters and news outlets all over the continent.

The organisation then reminded the Secretary General that most AU member states have signed Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, all of which recognize an individual's right to seek, receive, and impart information without fear of reprisal.

CPJ then called on the Secretary General to ensure that the media in the AU member states can function freely, without intimidation, harassment, or restrictions. To do so, the organisation urged him to work toward amending the African Union's constitution in order to provide guarantees of press freedom and freedom of expression.

The Southern Africa Journalists Association (SAJA) also joined its voice to the call on the African Union to play an active role in promoting press freedom throughout the continent, saying it is ready to work with and support the newly-formed organisation on this front. The call came during the recent SAJA first annual general meeting in Mbabane, Swaziland, which brought together journalist groups from 14 southern African countries.

At the general meeting, SAJA welcomed the launch of the African Union and stressed the need for pluralist, professional and independent media in Africa. "In many countries, journalists work under intolerable conditions because of disregard of their professional, social and trade union rights," SAJA declared.

SAJA plans to draw up proposals for working with the AU and other regional bodies to promote press freedom, media pluralism and journalistic independence, including the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Africa Alerts... Africa Alerts... Africa Alerts...

Democratic Republic of Congo: Bonsange Transferred to Hospital

Delly Bonsange, who was sentenced to six months' imprisonment on September 6, 2002, has been transferred to hospital with high blood sugar levels. The next appeal hearing against the sentences handed down to Bonsange and Raymond Kabala was due to take place on October 4, 2002 at the Kinshasa/Ndjili High Court.

Bonsange, a diabetic, was moved to Kinshasa General Hospital on September 26, after a check-up from a prison doctor. His condition has been caused by a change in his diet since entering prison and being barred from taking his diabetes medication in the first few days of his imprisonment.

Bonsange, publisher of the Kinshasa-based newspaper Alerte Plus, was ordered to pay US$100,000 damages and given a six-month sentence for making "written falsehoods". Kabala, the newspaper's publication director, was fined US$200,000 damages and sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment for making "harmful accusations". Kabala claims he was tortured until he...
named Bonsange as the author of an article speculating about the health of Mwenze Kongolo, the Security and Public Order Minister.

**Niger: Human Rights Advocate Sentenced to 12 Months Imprisonment**

The Niamey Regional Court, on September 19, 2002, sentenced Elhadji Bagnou Bonkoukou, the 75-year-old President of the Niger Human Rights League (LNDH), to 12 months in prison. He was convicted for allegedly disseminating "false news."

According to a statement by the Accra, Ghana-based Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) Elhadji Bonkoukou was arrested on August 14, 2002, by the Niamey Criminal Investigation Department. His arrest was in connection with statements he had made on local radio stations and on the BBC, in which he cast doubts on the official verdict of the death tolls in two separate clashes at Diffa and Niamey, between army mutineers and forces loyal to the government. The Minister of National Defence had given an official casualty figure of two deaths (one from the mutineers and one of the loyal forces) and 72 unaccounted for. Another 217 of the mutineers were said to have been arrested.

The LNDH President, however, maintained that given the level of violence in the two clashes, the civilian and army casualties were probably higher, and called for an independent inquiry into the events. Following those statements, he was detained for close to one month, before being charged to court for trial on September 5.

This rather harsh sentence on Elhadji comes in spite of ongoing mediation efforts by the president of the InterAfrican Human Rights Union (UIDH) and MFWA board member, Halidou Ouédraogo, to secure his release.

MFWA in the statement said it is appalled by the demonstrated intolerance to free expression by Prime Minister Hama Amadou's government. The statement cited the Niamey Police authorities' May 18 arrest and detention of Sanoussi Tambari Jackcou, publisher of the weekly *La Roue de l'Histoire* newspaper and Abdoulaye Tiémogo of radio TAMBARA FM, at the instance of the Prime Minister, for making "unethical remarks that could disturb public order."

Again, on June 28, 2002, the Niamey Regional Court sentenced the managing editor of the independent *Le Canard Dechaine* newspaper, Abdoulaye Tiémogo, to eight months imprisonment for the offence of "insult and libel" against the Prime Minister. In addition, he was fined CFA50,000 francs and also ordered to pay one million CFA francs in damages to the Prime Minister.

The MFWA, therefore, called for the unconditional release of Elhadji Banou Bonkoukou and urged the government to stop the repressive use of the law courts to silence critical voices in the country.

**Liberia: Nyenetue Released, Hassan Bility Still Incommunicado**

Maria Nyenetue, mother of the child of one of the journalists detained by the Liberian government was reportedly released in early September. Nyenetue went missing on August 20, 2002, when she traveled to the town of Klay in the hope of visiting Hassan Bility, by whom she has a child. She was arrested because of her connection with Bility. Her release came two weeks later without charge.

Meanwhile, Bility, the editor of the newspaper *The Analyst*, has still not been brought to trial and his whereabouts remain unknown. The two men with whom he was arrested on June 24 are being held at the National Security Agency and are able to receive visits from their families.

Hassan Bility was detained amidst claims by Information Minister Reginald Goodridge that he was running a Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) "terrorist cell" engaged in the attempted overthrow of the government. Five attempts to force the authorities to produce him have failed and there are fears that he may be tortured or mistreated in custody. Bility also suffers from malaria.
The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN in a statement said while it welcomes the news of the release of Nyenetue, appealed to the authorities to disclose the whereabouts of Bility and allow access to him.

ATTACKS ON THE PRESS IN SEPTEMBER 2002

**The Comet Correspondent Detained**

Mr. Femi Shodunke, the Ogun State correspondent of *The Comet* newspapers was on September 11 locked up for over four hours by officials of the Ogun State Board of Internal Revenue in Abeokuta while investigating a case of fraud involving top hierarchy of the parastatal.

Mr. Shodunke narrated that he had gone to the Oke Mosan office of the board to investigate the case of disappearance of N58 million allegedly through the hands of top officials of the board. He stated that at the office, he was given a form to fill when he requested to see the board Chairman, Mr. Olujimi Kuye. He added that the chairman ordered his 'arrest' when he came out and thereafter he was detained for over four hours.

**Vanguard Reporter Brutalised**

Some persons in the village of Isseke one in Awo-omanma community in Imo State assaulted Okechukwu Ndiribe, a journalist with *Vanguard* newspapers on September 15. They confiscated his Kodak camera and threw his GSM handset into the mud.

Mr. Ndiribe said that he was travelling from Aba to Onitsha and as a journalist was taking photographs of the deplorable areas of the Onitsha Owerri roads which he intended to use for a story whenever he returned to Lagos. When the vehicle he was travelling on got to the village, he said he discovered some youths had erected barricades on the road and were extorting money from motorists. When some of the youths saw him took a shot of their act they raised alarm and chased the bus in which he was travelling. When they caught up with it, they surrounded it and started attacking it.

The youths pounded and poured mud water on the body of the bus and inside as well threatened to kill the passengers and burn the vehicle if the photographer was not surrendered. Mr. Ndiribe narrated that at a point one of the hoodlums gained entrance into the bus through the window and came to grab him by his shirt. They forced him down and began to beat him with blows to several parts of his body. They took his Kodak camera, poured mud water on his body and on several passengers in the bus and threw his GSM handset into a pool of mud water before the bus was let go.

All efforts at securing his cameraman failed. He subsequently made a report at Mgbidi Police Station from where he was referred back to Awo-Omanma Police post. Despite that his identification of some of his attackers the police could neither arrest them nor get them to release his camera.

**Sharia Implementers, Policemen Arrest Vendors**

Some members of the Sharia implementation committee, and some men and officers from the Kebbi State Police Command on September 20 stormed Sokoto State where they arrested six vendors and the chairman of Sokoto State branch of Newspaper Vendors Association of Nigeria (NVAN). They took the arrested vendors to Kebbi, the Kebbi State Capital.

Secretary of the Sokoto State branch of NVAN, Mr. Johnson Elegbede stated that the vendors were arrested on the allegation that they were circulating foreign and home pornographic magazines. He said members of the Committee said pornography is against Islam and punishable under the state Islamic law.
Mr. Elegbede said while the arrest was being made, he rushed off to report the matter to the Sokoto State Police Commissioner, Mr. Nathern Lakobo. He added that before himself and officers detailed to follow him to investigate the matter got to the scene of the incident, the invaders from Kebbi State had left with the vendors.

Lakobo confirmed the presence of Police from Kebbi State in Sokoto as well as the arrest of vendors.

**JOURNALISM / PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS**

**Call For Nominations, Applications For Oak Fellowship**

The Oak Institute for the Study of International Human Rights is soliciting nominations and applications for the Oak Human Rights Fellowship for the Fall of 2003. The fellow is to undertake a semester-long fellowship as a scholar/activist-in-residence at Colby College in Waterville, Maine from September to December.

The Fellow will also be involved in some collaborative teaching with members of the Colby Faculty, and participate in the intellectual life of the campus to enable the college students to work and study with a professional in the field. At the end of the period of the award, it is expected that the Fellow will return to his or her human rights work.

For this fellowship, priority will be given to a practitioner in the field of refugees and displaced populations in Asia or Africa. Also especially encouraged are applications from those who are currently or were recently involved in "on-the-ground" work at some level of personal risk.

The fellow will receive a stipend and College fringe benefits approximately up to the tune of $30,000 plus round-trip transportation from the Fellow's country, housing for a family, use of a car, and some meals on campus. The Fellow will also receive research support, including office space, secretarial support, computer and library facilities, and a student research assistant.

For more information contact Professor Mary Beth Mills, or Eliza Denoeux, e-mail: oakhr@colby.edu Deadline for completed applications is January 15, 2002.

For application forms visit: http://www.colby.edu/oak

**Master's Degree Program In Health Journalism  Available**

A New Master's Degree Program In Health Journalism created by the University's School of Journalism & Mass Communication (SJMC) and School of Public Health (SPH), the University of Minnesota will launch the only program of its kind in the US. The SJMC Graduate Studies office is currently accepting applications for the program.

For more information about application requirements, materials and deadlines see http://www.healthjournalism.umn.edu/

**Reporter Wins Commonwealth Internship**

The Communications and Public Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat in Marlborough House London in the United Kingdom announced on June 12 that it had awarded its Annual six months internship programme for the year 2002 to Mr. Ganiyu Oludare Lasisi a Senior Reporter with the Monitor Newspaper Limited. This is in recognition of his incisive news reporting on Commonwealth affairs and other issues involving human development and environment in Nigeria.

The internship programme is to provide young journalists in Commonwealth countries with training in and exposure to the workings of all divisions in the Commonwealth Secretariat. It will also expose beneficiaries to the communications and Public Affairs Division, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) and increase journalists' awareness of the Commonwealth, its fundamental values and its development cooperation activities.
The programme commenced July 18 and is billed to end in December 2002.

According to Mr. Lasisi, "The six-month assignment would take the form of work experience and training in the production of written articles for three important information outlets of the secretariat: the Commonwealth News and Information Service (CNIS); Commonwealth Currents, a quarterly magazine; and the Secretariat's website." He added that the award is dedicated to all young journalists in developing Commonwealth countries working under unpleasant conditions and in dangerous zones.

**Nigerians Win Commonwealth Broadcasting Travel Awards**

Broadcasters in Nigeria, India, Malawi, the United Kingdom and Gibraltar have been awarded travel bursaries by the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA). The bursaries, each worth up to £2,000, are awarded annually to broadcasters for a visit to another Commonwealth country on a project to benefit the recipient's organisation and society.

The winners include: Olabode Moses, a producer/scriptwriter with the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). He will go to South Africa to attend a short training course in Practical TV Production Techniques, Digital and Satellite Programming. He also plans to attend the International Film and Video Festival Sithengi 2002 in November.

Stephen Ogu Moses Okpanachi, assistant chief engineer (satellite communication) with the NTA. He will go to Orbicom, also in South Africa to broaden his knowledge of multi-channel transmission.

Others are Raymond Kataika, a producer with the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation; James Neish, a broadcast journalist with Gibraltar Broadcasting Corporation; Elettra Neysmith, senior broadcast journalist with the BBC World Service in the UK; Anne Nkungula, a producer with the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation; and Pankajkumar Saha, Executive Producer, Doordarshan, Kolkata, India.

The bursaries are funded by the Commonwealth Foundation, the Elizabeth R Fund and, in the case of the Gibraltar bursary, part-funded by the Government of Gibraltar.

"It has long been recognized that a virile, independent and robust media is an indispensable adjunct to sustainable democracy. That, perhaps, is why the framers of our Constitution, in recognition of this fact entrenched freedom of expression and the press in Section 39 of our Constitution.”

Hon. Chibudom Nwuche, 2002
Presenting the Nigeria Media Bill at the House