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Media NGOs Seek Guidelines for Operation Of Community Radios In Nigeria

Advocates of community radio in Nigeria are seeking policy guidelines for the licensing and operation of community radios in the absence of a legal framework which provides for the establishment of such stations.

The community radio advocates rose from a one-day Roundtable Discussion on Community Radio in Nigeria with a resolve to request the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to draw up blueprint which will enable community radios take root and flourish in Nigeria.

The Roundtable was organized by the African Bureau of Radio Netherlands, based in Cotonou, Benin Republic, in collaboration with Media Rights Agenda (MRA). Its objective was to examine the obstacles to the establishment of community radios in Nigeria and determine
what could be done to solve those problems to pave way for the introduction of community radios.

The Roundtable was attended by 13 participants drawn from civil society organizations working on different projects which touch on various aspects of the community radio idea, including advocates for legislative and policy reform to facilitate the introduction of community radios in Nigeria, organizations involved in the training of journalists in the production of grassroots radio programming, among others.

Also in attendance were Dr. Soule Issiaka, Director of the African Bureau of Radio Netherland; Mr. Salim Wole Abioye, the Deputy Director of News and Head of the Department of Journalism at the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Training School in Lagos; and Mr. Mac Emakpore, NBC’s director of monitoring.

In a welcome speech, MRA’s Executive Director, Mr. Edetaen Ojo, said the Roundtable arose from a project being implemented under a World Bank grant by Dr. Issiaka, and that it was intended to examine the obstacles which have inhibited the establishment of community radios in Nigeria and propose solutions to these problems.

He observed that the organizations represented at the Roundtable had done some work in various aspects of the community radio idea and expressed the hope that their presence and experiences in their various projects would be helpful in assessing the practical problems facing the introduction of community radios in Nigeria and in fashioning out strategies for addressing them.

Dr. Issiaka explained that the World Bank Development Marketplace Project #2006 – To Give People Voice: Grassroots Media Development in Africa, which he is implementing on behalf of Radio Netherland, with a grant from the World Bank, is meant to empower community radio stations in Africa.

He said the grant from the World Bank is intended to support the development of community radios in four African countries namely, Zambia, Malawi, Ghana and Nigeria.

Dr. Issiaka explained that the grant from the World Bank has helped to conduct media audits generally in the relevant countries as well as audits of the status of radio and audits on community radio. He noted however that Nigeria is the only country where an audit on community radio has not been possible since there are currently no community radios in existence in the country. But he said he had previously commissioned a study on the framework for community radio in Nigeria to look at the problems and the scope for reform. He explained that the Roundtable was a follow up to the study.

He said under the project, a review of media legislation has also been carried out in collaboration with the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) and the Africa Programme of ARTICLE 19, the Global Campaign for Free Expression, based in Johannesburg.

According to him, in countries where community radios already exist, some of the stations have received equipment support either through the provision of new equipment or with an upgrade of their existing equipment. He added that some of the stations have also received training for their personnel.

Dr. Issiaka said he was concerned that Nigeria was being left out of the scope of the community radio project owing to the non-existence of community radios in the country. But he hoped that the situation would change in the near future following the apparent interest of civil society organizations in Nigeria on the issue and the World Bank’s decision that all its community driven projects will include a media component as this means that logically, the community radio is the most significant media for such community driven projects.

He said community radio has its origin firstly in the process of democratization around the world, especially since the 1980s. According to him, the new constitutions in the
democratizing states recognized a right to freedom of expression and freedom of association generally.

A combination of these two rights, he said, formed the legal basis for community radio. He noted that community radios mushroomed in Francophone Africa, but not in the Anglophone because Francophone countries in Africa were faster in democratizing than their Anglophone counterparts.

Besides, he said, Francophone countries have been fighting for the “demonopolisation” of radio and these developments helped community radio in Francophone Africa.

Dr. Issiaka noted that when radio pluralism emerged in francophone Africa, it was not a planned event. But with the development, state radio became public service radio or public service media.

He argued that Francophone Africa had an ancestry in community radio as the programme division in state radio in Francophone countries always had an autonomous and specialized department which catered to the interest of rural areas dedicated to peasants and speaking in local languages.

But he said today, all countries surrounding Nigeria have a minimum of 50 community radios, while Nigeria appeared to be the only one left out.

Dr. Issiaka said there was a real issue about what is community radio, arguing that it is defined by ownership, management and content.

According to him, in some countries, the ownership must be the community through a freely elected management by the members of the community. The content must also be mostly community oriented and often in local languages. He added that the radiance of the station must also be the community.

He identified an important element of the community radio as the fact that it can be sure, more than the formal state radio, that it has an audience since the community is part of the project.

He debunked the fear of radio stations by African and other leaders saying “experience has shown that the more radio stations there are in a country, the less dangerous radio becomes.”

Dr. Issiaka described radio as the only real natural technological extension of the African oral tradition saying this was responsible for its popularity in Africa.

According to him, Africans have a natural affinity with the radio and radio broadcasting comes naturally to most of them regardless of their level of education. He contended that radio is rooted in the African culture and gives natural expression to the cultures and traditions of Africans. Saying that radio in Africa was both the medium and the message, he argued that the radio was not just a tool of communication in Africa, but was also a means of community empowerment.

Dr. Issiaka stressed that community radio is particularly important since any country which does not have community radio is not yet out of danger because once it has many community radios, no one, including those who take over power by force of arms, can close all of them down. He added that community radio had a more important role to play than merely ensuring media pluralism because it is the “cement of democracy and demonopolisation.”

Subsequent discussions at the meeting focused on the legal framework for community radio in Nigeria, the social and political environment, community participation, manpower training requirements, sustainability, and the status of community radio in Nigeria.

The participants agreed that there is no community radio, properly so called, currently in existence in Nigeria. This was attributed primarily to the inadequate legal framework which does not expressly provide for the licensing and operation of community radios in Nigeria, the prohibitive fees for obtaining radio licences, and the requirement that anyone applying for a radio license must first incorporate a limited liability company as this form of incorporation would be difficult for communities seeking to establish and operate community radios.
The participants agreed that there was a need to introduce appropriate legislation to guide the licencing and operation of community radios in Nigeria but that in the interim, the NBC could draw up guidelines for the establishment and operation of community radios as a policy document while advocacy for the enactment of a law by the National Assembly was being pursued.

According to them, since the National Broadcasting Commission Act and its amendment did not expressly prohibit the licensing of community radios, there was nothing preventing the NBC from working within the present legal framework to formulate policy which would allow it to consider applications for community radios.

The participants noted that the main problem with the establishment of community radios in Nigeria was the prohibitive licensing fees for radios, and observed that since the fees were not provided by law but had been stipulated by the NBC in the exercise of its powers under the National Broadcasting Commission Act, the Commission could create a category of license fees for community radios that would take into account the fact that they are not profit making and need to be able to exist and operate on very low budgets.

They contended that unless the NBC develops a framework for the licensing and operation of community radio, communities which are interested in applying for licenses would not even be aware that they can obtain licenses and would simply assume, following the current state of the law, that it would not be possible for them to get community radio licenses.

Besides, the participants noted, even those that are aware that the NBC can grant them licenses for community radios would not know the requirements and might thus be discouraged from applying. They said by issuing and publicizing guidelines for applying for community radio licenses and for the operation of such stations, the NBC would be generating more public awareness around the issue which would then encourage communities to come forward with applications.

It was agreed that some participants at the Roundtable representing civil society organizations should form the core of an association of community radio promoters with the understanding that membership of the association could be institutional or individual.

The participants at the meeting also agreed that:

♦ Civil society organizations and cooperations involved in the efforts to promote the introduction and establishment of community radios in Nigeria should write a joint letter to the NBC requesting it to issue a policy position on community radio. The letter should request the NBC in the policy document to outline guidelines for the licencing and operation of community radios. Alongside this, an intensive public enlightenment campaign should be initiated to generate public interest and awareness about the issue of community radio as well as create a social and political climate which would make the NBC respond to the letter timeously.

♦ The promoters of community radios should initiate and provoke a public discussion on the community radio framework. In the course of the debates, they should progressively expand the scope of civil society organizations and associations campaigning for the introduction and establishment of community radios in Nigeria.

♦ There should be more coordination to push for the harmonization of all the relevant bills currently pending before the National Assembly and the subsequent passage of a law on the licensing and operation of community radios in Nigeria.

♦ There should be concerted efforts to publicize the notion of community radios.

♦ The promoters of the community radio idea should form themselves into a Community Radio Promoters Group (CRPG). The CRPG will embark on the sensitization of communities on the idea of community radios through the media (both broadcast and print) and through awareness programmes and seminars.
NLC Picketing Of NTA Raises Questions Over Status Of Publicly Funded Media

For two hours on July 3, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) picketed the premises of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in Lagos, alleging biased reporting of its strike over the increase in the prices of petroleum products.

NLC members in about 20 vehicles stormed NTA alleging that the station reported it negatively in the eight-day strike called by it to protest Federal government increase in the pump price of petroleum products. They took control of the Ahmadu Bello Way, Victoria Island offices of the NTA singing war songs.

NLC Vice President, Mr. Onikolase Irabor who led the NLC team to NTA warned its management to stop feeding its 30 million viewers with falsehood reminding it that NTA is funded with taxpayers’ money and so has a binding duty to report issues of national interest objectively.

The mode of operation of publicly funded media like the NTA, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the Voice of Nigeria (VON), which resulted in the workers’ protest, calls into question their status. In other words, are they government propaganda outlets, public services broadcasters or commercial broadcasters? It also raises questions over what their level of editorial independence should be and how this can be guaranteed.

This is not the first time publicly funded media would exhibit such blatant bias in reporting conflicts that concern the Federal Executive and any institution seen as being in opposition. The most prominent cases in recent times have been the NLC and the National Assembly.

In mid-January 2002, the stations declined to air the NLC’s perspective in a similar strike. Instead, they focused on the government’s position, which they promoted and parroted contrary to the journalistic principles of balance, fairness and objectivity.

The director general of the FRCN, Mr. Eddie Iroh, later justified FRCN’s action in an article. According to him, the FRCN took the stand to protect the stability; corporate existence and Nigeria’s new democracy, which its management felt “could be derailed by the ill advised strike”. He added that the FRCN did not want to give oxygen to an action that threatened the very stability of the nation.

Paradoxically, despite asserting earlier in the article that “Radio Nigeria of today was committed to balanced and objective journalism, he concluded his article by saying that the FRCN “shall not be neutral when the interest of the nation is at stake.”

A similar situation occurred in August 2002 when the National Assembly issued an ultimatum to President Olusegun Obasanjo to resign or face impeachment proceedings. The publicly funded broadcast media refused to air the news item which is of major significance and blacked it out completely, focusing on less important news stories.

Following the development, the National Assembly summoned the then Minister of Information and National Orientation, Professor Jerry Gana, and the directors general of the NTA and the FRCN and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to explain their biased reporting of the face-off between the President and the Federal legislature.

Government media in Nigeria, either at the state or federal level, despite being funded by taxpayers, lack independence in their editorial and operational matters. Their managements are political appointees who answer to the whims of their chief executives. This has resulted in political interference in their editorial decision making as well as a great deal of censorship.

They operate with the mentality that since the chief executive pays the piper, he should dictate the tune. There is also the fear, which is not unfounded, that if these media exhibit
editorial independence and are objective in reporting issues, especially controversial ones in which the opposition is given time or space to speak, the management of such media may be sacked.

The problem is in part created by the laws establishing the publicly funded media houses which do not guarantee their independence, either in the management structure or in editorial matters.

For instance, the Nigerian Television Authority Act, which established the NTA does not give independence to it either explicitly or by implication. Rather NTA’s operations are tied to the President through the Minister of Information. Section 2(1) vests the power of appointing the members of the Authority on “the National Council of Ministers (now Federal Executive Council) on the recommendation of the Minister”. The Minister is himself also a political appointee.

Section 4(1) of the Act also vests the power of removing any member of the Authority on the Council, with the recommendation of the Minister. In the same vein, Section 5 establishes the office of the Director General whose appointment is also by the Minister with the approval of the Council, while Section 11 also makes it mandatory for NTA to broadcast government programme sent to it by “an authorised public officer”.

Similarly, Section 13 of the Act makes it mandatory for NTA to comply with any directive which the Minister may give to it, whether of a general character or on particular matters with regard to the exercise by the NTA of its function under this Act.

The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria Act established the FRCN and the provisions having to do with its establishment, appointment of members of the Board, the Director General, broadcast of government programmes and announcements and taking direction of specific and general matter from the Minister are virtually the same as those of the NTA. The situation is also the same under the News Agency of Nigeria Act, which established NAN.

In the case of the Voice of Nigeria established by Decree 15 of 1990, most of these powers are vested in the President who acts on the recommendation of the Minister. The provisions follow a similar pattern like those of the NTA and the FRCN.

Even the broadcast media regulator, the NBC established by the National Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38 of 1992 as amended by Decree No. 55 of 1999, also lacks independence in its operations. The chairman and members of the Commission’s Board as well as the Director General are appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Minister.

The law does not even empower the NBC to license broadcast stations, rather it is to recommend applications through the Minister to the President for the grant of radio and television licences. Like in the radio and television stations which it is supposed to regulate, the Commission is obliged to comply with whatever directive the Minister may issue to it.

It is apparent therefore that those who established publicly funded media never intended for them to be independent in any way but rather to be answerable to them or the government in power. The enabling laws do not provide for the involvement of the National Assembly in the operations of the media establishment and completely subject them to Executive control.

The laws establishing NTA and FRCN gave them the function of providing, as a public service, independent and impartial television or radio broadcasting to Nigerians. But it is doubtful what their actual categorization would be; whether they are public broadcasters, the government’s publicity department or commercial broadcasters.

One characteristic of public broadcasters, such as the NTA and the FRCN are meant to be, is that they do not carry adverts since they are funded by through the public purse. Ironically, it is the issue of funding has been one of the main tools used by government officials to undermine their independence and maintain a tight control over their operations.
These legal provisions go against the grain of international standard for the guarantee of the independence of public service broadcasters and the principles of the right to freedom of expression and the press.

For instance, the Council of Europe’s Recommendation No R (96) 10 on the Guarantee of the Independence of Public Service Broadcasting adopted by its Committee of Ministers on September 11, 1996 recognizes among other things “that the independence of the media, including broadcasting, is essential for the functioning of a democratic society.”

The recommendations affirm “the vital role of public service broadcasting as an essential factor of pluralistic communication which is accessible to everyone at both national and regional levels, through the provision of a basic comprehensive programme service comprising information, education, culture and entertainment.”

They provide that the legal framework governing public service broadcasting organisations should clearly stipulate their editorial independence and institutional autonomy, especially in areas such as: the definition of programme schedules; programmes conception and production; the editing and presentation of news and current affairs programmes; and the organisation of the activities of the service, etc.

They also require that the rules governing the status of the supervisory bodies of public service broadcasting organisations, (in the case of Nigeria, the NBC) especially their membership, should be defined in a way which avoids placing the bodies at risk of political or other interference.

It provides that the rules should, in particular, guarantee that the members of the supervisory bodies: are appointed in an open and pluralistic manner; collectively representing the interests of society in general; may not receive any mandate or take any instructions from any person or body other than the one which appointed them, subject to any contrary provisions prescribed by law in exceptional cases; may not be dismissed, suspended or replaced during their term of office by any person or body other than the one which appointed them, except where the supervisory body has duly certified that they are incapable of or have been prevented from exercising their functions.

Nearer home, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights has also provided guidance to member states of the African Union who are state parties to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

In its “Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa” adopted in Banjul, The Gambia, in October last year, the Africa Commission prescribed that:

“State and government controlled broadcasters should be transformed into public service broadcasters, accountable to the public through the Legislature rather than the government, in accordance with the following principles:

♦ public broadcasters should be governed by a board which is protected against interference, particularly of a political or economic nature;
♦ the editorial independence of public service broadcasters should be guaranteed;
♦ public broadcasters should be adequately funded in a manner that protects them from arbitrary interference with their budgets;
♦ public broadcasters should strive to ensure that their transmission system covers the whole territory of the country; and
♦ the public service ambit of public broadcasters should be clearly defined and include an obligation to ensure that the public receive adequate, politically balanced information, particularly during election periods.”

The Nigerian government appears either ignorant of these internationally agreed principles or is simply not interested in following them, despite the injunction of the African Commission that
all state parties to the African Charter should “make every effort to give practical effect to these principles.”

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CBA African Regional Conference Holds In Abuja In September


The Conference will focus on “Broadcasting and Health” and have in attendance Dr Eyitayo Lambo, the Minister of Health, Senator Adolphus Wabara, the Senate President who will declare the conference open, and Chief Chukwuemeka Chikelu, the Minister of Information and National Orientation who will speak at the opening session, and Peter Matlare, Group Chief Executive of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Mr. Taiwo Allimi, President of Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON) will be the session Chairman.

There will be a panel on “The Potential of Using the Media for Health Education” with eminent medical doctors participating. Speakers expected include Dr J Gyapong, Director of Health Research Unit Ministry of Health Ghana; Dr Abdulsalami Nasidi, Director of Special Projects of the Federal Ministry of Health Nigeria; as well as Dr Shirley Owusu-Ofori MD, Transfusion Medicine Unit, Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital, Kumasi, Ghana. Others are Dr Grace Malenga, Director Malaria Alert Centre Malawi and Dr Daniel Nyangulu, Director, National TB Control Programme, Malawi.

Those invited to speak at the broadcasting session are Edda Sang’A/Director of Broadcasting, Radio Tanzania; William Ikapel, Corporation Secretary, KBC; Bora Mboge, DG Gambia Radio and TV Services; and Jack Turiamwijuka, Commissioner of Radio Broadcasting, Uganda.

There will also be a session on “Resource Implications” which will have in attendance Walter Otis Tapfumaneyi, HIV/AIDS Programme Officer for Panos South Africa; Bill Ryerson, President, Population Media Centre, USA; Angela Dawson, Gates Malaria Partnership, and Tim Carrington, Senior Comuncations Officer, Africa Region, World Bank.

The President, George Velaro and the secretary general, Mrs. Elizabeth Smith and will lead both the executive committee and the secretariat to the conference and meeting. No fewer than 100 delegates from member countries that have confirmed their intention to attend.

One of the highlights of the CBA General Meeting is the Award Ceremony for excellence and quality broadcasting in Commonwealth nations.

The Abuja Conference will serve as a prelude to the forthcoming Commonwealth of Heads of Governments Meeting (CHOGM) scheduled for December 2003.

It is the first time the country will be hosting a CBA conference after her suspension from the body in 1995 following the judicial murder of playwright/human rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his kinsmen. Nigeria was readmitted in 1999 following the enthronement of civilian rule.

The Voice of Nigeria (VON) will host the Conference Organising Committee.

PEN Canada Launches Website For Impunity Campaign

The Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) of International PEN in collaboration with PEN Canada, has recently launched a new website as part of its year-long campaign on unsolved and unpunished crimes against writers and journalists.

The Campaign on Freedom of Expression and Impunity was launched on 25 November 2002 in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico at a WiPC conference. Direct actions will be taken throughout the year, culminating in the release of a report on the problem of impunity and a series of public programs during International PEN’s 69th World Congress of Writers in Mexico in November 2003.
To stay up to date on the campaign, including news of killings and how to take action, visit the PEN Canada Website and follow the links to the Impunity campaign. Click here: http://www.pencanada.ca

**IPI To Hold Congress In Salzburg In September**

The International Press Institute has rescheduled its World Congress and 52nd General Assembly to hold in Salzburg, Austria from 13 to 16 September. IPI originally planned to hold the meeting in Nairobi, Kenya last May, but cancelled it due to warnings about possible terrorist attacks in the country.

The congress will include panel sessions on the following topics: “Pluralism, Democracy and the Clash of Civilisations”; “SARS and the Media”; “Media in War Zones and Regions of Conflict”; “Presentation of the International News Safety Institute (INSI)”; “Analysing the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)”; “The Oslo Accords - 10 Years On”; “Media Self-Regulation: A Press Freedom Issue”; and “The Transatlantic Rift.”

**Open Society Justice Initiative Spotlights Freedom Of Information**

The Open Society Justice Initiative has dedicated the first issue of its new online newsletter to freedom of information (FOI). “Justice Initiatives” chronicles the international freedom-of-information movement, Nigeria’s push for an FOI law, and the experiences of new FOI legislation in Bulgaria and Mexico. The issue also contains reports from a recent conference on FOI laws in southeast Europe held by ARTICLE 19, Open Society and the Croatian Helsinki Committee.

The Open Society Justice Initiative, a program of the Open Society Institute, promotes rights-based law reform, builds knowledge and strengthens legal capacity worldwide. Thematic areas include freedom of information and expression, anti-corruption, national criminal justice reform, international justice, equality and citizenship.

The full issue is available at http://www.justiceinitiative.org/publications/justiceinitiatives

**APC Launches Lobbying Guide For Information Society Summit**

For civil society organisations involved in Internet Communication Technologies (ICT) development, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) presents an opportunity to open up debates on policy issues on both the world stage and on national levels, says the Association for Progressive Communications (APC).

APC has just published a guide to help organisations lobby governments on ICT policy issues and initiate national consultations around the WSIS. APC says the purpose of the guide is to encourage civil society organisations to develop skills and experience in policy lobbying. “By engaging in the issues outlined at the WSIS, civil society organisations can begin to articulate positions and gain valuable experience in lobbying that can be taken back to their home countries,” says APC.

The UN-sponsored WSIS is being held in Geneva, Switzerland, in December 2003. Its aim is to bring heads-of-state from around the world to launch a global framework for confronting the challenges of the information society.

The APC’s guide is available online at: http://rights.apc.org/nationalfaq_wsis_v1.pdf
Indigenous Media Network Seeks New Members

The Indigenous Media Network (IMN), which seeks to build linkages between “first nation” journalists from around the world and to produce professional, accurate reporting from an indigenous perspective, is seeking new members. Formed in 2002 with assistance from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, the fledgling organisation’s mission statement says it is committed to using journalism as a tool to campaign for the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide and to combat discrimination against indigenous peoples.

“Many indigenous journalists see a strong link between journalism and activism because so many of their people live in small and isolated communities. Dissemination of information and effective use of the media is thus critical to their survival as peoples,” the group says.

For more information, visit www.indigenousmedia.org

A RARE GEM IS GONE

With Sadness and a deep sense of loss, the Management and Staff of Media Rights Agenda announce the passing away of our dear friend and colleague, MS. JOSEPHINE ADENENAYA IZUAGIE, Vice Chair, Executive Committee of Media Rights Agenda, who slept in the Lord on Friday August 1, 2003, after a brief illness. May her gentle soul rest in perfect peace

Signed:
Management.

NUJ Sues President Obasanjo Over Taylor’s Asylum

The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) on July 25 formally instituted a legal action at an Abuja Federal High Court against President Olusegun Obasanjo for granting political asylum to the Liberian President, Mr. Charles Taylor. The NUJ instituted the suit to protest the 1989 murder of two Nigerian journalists: Krees Imodibe of The Guardian newspapers and Tayo Awotusin of Daily Champion newspapers.

The NUJ in the suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/352/2003 has Mr. Charles Taylor and the Federal Republic of Nigeria as defendants and seeks, among others: an order restraining Mr. Charles Taylor from coming into Nigeria for political asylum; an order restraining the Federal Republic of Nigeria, its agents, privies or whosoever from offering asylum to Mr. Charles Taylor pending the hearing of the substantive suit.

The NUJ intends, in the substantive suit, to ask the court for an order of perpetual injunction to restrain Taylor from coming to Nigeria for political asylum or any other reason and another order of perpetual injunction restraining him from carrying out the offered asylum in Nigeria.

The 13-paragraph statement of claims accused Taylor and his officers in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) of Killing the two journalists without provocation, justification or excuse and so was unfit to seek asylum in Nigeria. The union also averred that having been investigated and indicted by the United Nations for war crimes in Sierra Leone and arrest warrant issued, he should not enter the country.
The motion on notice was brought pursuant to Order A Rule 18; Order A Rule 1 of the Federal High Court (Civil Procedure Rules 2000 and the inherent powers of the court under Section 6(6) of the 1999 Constitution.

Mr. Smart Adeyemi the NUJ President had earlier in Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State said: “Charles Taylor was the one who killed two Nigerian journalists in the course of covering the civil war in Liberia.

“So we believe that our nation should not be a haven for Charles Taylor. He should be allowed to face the music.”

He argued that giving protection to Taylor in Nigeria would send a wrong signal to the international community and urged Obasanjo to reconsider the issue.

Since President Obasanjo offered asylum to Mr. Taylor, many Nigerians have spoken against the decision, with some describing the offer as insensitive to the feelings of Nigerians and a ploy to shield Mr. Taylor from facing the law. A report on Channels television on July 18 also said kinsmen of late Krees Imodibe one of the two journalists killed by rebels suspected to be loyal to Mr. Taylor had protested in front of its office against granting asylum to Mr. Taylor. The protesters were reported to have insisted that Mr. Taylor should produce the body of the murdered journalist who was a Prince for the traditional burial. They also demanded that Mr. Taylor must come to their village to offer an apology to the people as customs demands.

JAAIDS Launches Project To Mobilise Media Activism In Stigma Reduction

Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) in Nigeria has announced the beginning of a two-year project to reduce HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination in the media and other identified communities in Nigeria.

The project, titled “Mobilising Media Activism and Community Participation in Stigma Reduction”, is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Rapid Response Mechanism for HIV/AIDS Activities (Community REACH) project, managed by Pact, Inc. in Washington, DC.

The project aims to harness the capacity of the Nigerian media and communities as a potential force for change to reduce the high levels of HIV-related stigma and discrimination in the country. The organisation plans to achieve this through a package of capacity-building, community empowerment and information dissemination activities targeted at key actors within the media, persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), public sector personalities and traditional leadership institutions in Nigeria.

The goal of the project is to reduce HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination in drastic, measurable terms within the media and other identifiable communities in Nigeria by mid-2005.

The project will equip gatekeepers in the media with accurate, up-to-date information to report on issues, challenges and solutions around stigma and discrimination; provide platforms for informed public discussion and debate on stigma and discrimination; and build capacity among leaders of the Nigerian media so that they will, on their own, become advocates for change both in communicating behaviour change to reduce stigma, and mobilising policy change for a legal and institutional framework that protects and promotes rights and access to redress for PLWHA and people affected by AIDS (PABA) when confronted by stigma.

Specific activities will include a baseline survey to determine key issues, factors and determinants of HIV-related stigma and discrimination in Nigeria, including focus group discussions, policy mapping and analysis and media monitoring studies; and consultative
roundtables to be held with PLWHA, media gatekeepers and community actors, aimed at generating popular debate around stigma and proffer ways to address stigma-related issues.

The roundtables will hold in Enugu, Kano, Ado-Ekiti (in Ekiti State) and Lagos.

Other activities are capacity building workshops aimed at building knowledge of stigma issues among media, PLWHA and leaders of targeted communities; as well as the publication and circulation of a tri-yearly newsletter showcasing the activities of community actors in reducing stigma and discrimination and providing information on services/facilities for protection of the rights of PLWHA. There will also be annual awards to profile and honour individuals and organizations who have by their actions and pronouncements, broken the silence surrounding stigma and discrimination in their communities. The awards will be incorporated into the Red Ribbon Awards on HIV/AIDS organized by JAAIDS annually since 2001. The awards are given out at a ceremony around December 1 (World AIDS Day) each year.

As a deliberate measure to spread competence in combating stigma and discrimination, the project will collaborate with PLWA networks and civil society coalitions across the country, especially the Network of PLWHA in Nigeria (NEPWHAN), the Treatment Action Movement (TAM) and the Civil Society Consultative Group on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (CiSCGHAN). PLWHA will also be included in activities of the project, either as implementing staff or resource persons.

By working to build the capacity of the media to disseminate accurate and non-stigmatising information to the public, as well as sensitising the general public and supporting the development of legislation and policies centred on human rights of PLWHA, the project will directly complement Nigeria’s national HIV/AIDS control strategies. Specifically, the project will help in fulfillment of two of the core strategies of the HIV/AIDS Emergency Action Plan ( HEAP), Nigeria’s battle plan for combating HIV/AIDS in 2001-2005: the removal of socio-cultural barriers (HEAP strategy no. 1); and the removal of information barriers to HIV/AIDS prevention and care (HEAP strategy no. 2).

The project will also support the activities of Nigeria’s Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM) for the Global Fund for AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, by building the capacity of community leaders in HIV/AIDS advocacy, especially to provide support and protect the rights of PLWHA; and by promoting increased partnership between the media, PLWHA, human rights groups and HIV/AIDS activists in protecting and affirming rights of PLWHA.

Kabissa Launches ‘Time to Get Online’ Project in Ghana

Following a successful pilot in Nigeria earlier this year, Kabissa, a nonprofit organization that seeks to use technology to strengthen organizations working to improve the lives of people in Africa, has launched the next phase of its “Time to Get Online” project in Ghana.

The project is designed to enable West African civil society organizations to use the Internet more effectively in their work.

Kabissa used the experiences of its members and other African nonprofit organizations as a basis for the project, saying that it has learned that many organizations are still unaware of the power of the Internet for the nonprofit sector and remain frustrated by a lack of skills to take advantage of the technology.

“Time to Get Online” addresses these barriers by providing organizations with learning materials and the opportunity to attend capacity-building workshops that focus on building the awareness and skills necessary to use the Internet effectively.

The learning materials allow organizations to work at their own pace through the stages of Internet usage, from connecting to the Internet to using the Internet as an advocacy tool. A

The on-site workshops give these organizations the opportunity to ask questions and interact with an Internet expert, and provide Kabissa with an effective way to distribute its materials and collect feedback.

In the current phase of the project, Kabissa plans to refine the learning materials and workshop curriculum based on feedback from pilot participants. The most significant change to the workshop format is the addition of an optional day of training, in which participants who are already Kabissa members will have the opportunity to receive training on Kabissa’s Internet services.

More information on the project or about how to participate is available at Kabissa’s Web site: http://www.timetogetonline.org Information may also be obtained from Kim Lowery at: ttgo@kabissa.org.

New Publications On Media Management In Emerging Democracies

The International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) has published three new manuals on media management in emerging democracies.

The three-volume set called “The Business of News: Running successful newspapers in emerging free markets”, discusses advertising, market research and newspaper management. The first manual, “Successful Newspaper Advertising: Building financial independence through ad revenue”, is written by Chris Braithwaite and demonstrates how advertising can provide independence from economic and political forces that often vie to control the media.

The second one, “Personnel and Profits: A guide to successful newspaper management” by Lewis Wolman, discusses how to run the business side of a newspaper, from accounting to distribution and circulation, to managing the newsroom and editorial staff.

In the third one, “Know Your Audience: Increasing Readership and Advertising Through Market Research”, Carrol Dadisman offers sample questionnaires, tips for conducting focus groups and cost-saving alternatives to hiring market research consultants.

If purchased separately, the publications cost US$8.50 each. The set of three costs US$20. The books can be ordered online at the ICJF’s web site: www.icfj.org.

IFLA Launches World Report On Libraries And Free Expression

Despite the worldwide spread of the Internet, libraries in poor countries are struggling to meet the challenge of providing equal access to public information due to censorship, financial barriers and lack of access and training, says a new report by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

“There is a long way to go before [many] countries, their libraries and their staff are suitably equipped and properly trained to meet the challenge of safeguarding their clients’ full participation in the information and knowledge society,” the report concludes.

Produced bi-annually by IFLA’s Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE), the report is the most comprehensive global survey of libraries and their role in fostering freedom of expression. It examines the state of libraries and intellectual freedom in 88 countries.

This year’s edition focuses on libraries and the Internet, including user privacy, intellectual freedom and online censorship.

The full report is available at its website http://www.ifla.org/index.htm
Final Negotiations Begin On UN Convention Against Corruption

The final round of negotiations on a United Nations treaty aimed at fighting the spread of corruption around the world began last month in Vienna, Austria, with more than 110 member States discussing remaining areas of divergence in order to reach consensus.

Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said: “The text being finalized over the next three weeks in Vienna has been compiled from proposals submitted by 26 countries from all regions of the world. That by itself reflects the global nature of the problem.”

The sixth session of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Negotiation of the UN Convention against Corruption, scheduled to run through August 8, focused on areas where divergence still exists, such as a search for a definition of corruption, assets recovery and the question of whether to sanction only public, or also private, corruption.

While all delegations agree on the need for global rules, and have made significant progress over past sessions, a long list of unresolved questions remains over issues like how binding they should be and how toughly they should be monitored. It is also not clear how tightly corruption as a concept should be defined.

Mr. Costa called for every effort to be made to reach consensus, arguing that: “The effective fight against corruption is a condition for good governance and rule of law. These in turn are foundations of financial stability and sustainable development. Above all, the world needs an anti-corruption instrument with teeth, namely able to have an impact.”

Finalizing the text would allow the new instrument to be submitted to the UN General Assembly at its 58th session to be held in September this year and to the High-level Signing Conference scheduled to take place in Merida, Mexico, from December 9 to 11.

The process has been dogged by debates between countries over how far to extend rules ranging from the international return of stolen assets to private-sector corruption and the transparent funding of political parties.

Although experts hope to conclude the text in time for the December launch in Mexico, its unprecedented ambition makes it very clear that the process will be a difficult one. Previous drafts of the Convention have looked not only to prevent and criminalise the bribery of public officials, but also to address untoward political funding, “trading in influence”, accountancy fraud and banking secrecy.

Mr. Costa argued that the rules were needed to respond to an international area of concern, although he acknowledged that they envisage big changes yet to be universally agreed.

For example, he said, “at the moment there is no legislation requiring recipient countries to return assets: if (countries do) it, they do it voluntarily.”

Transparency International, the Berlin-based anti-corruption organisation, has stressed that a tough convention is essential.

David Nussbaum, head of TI’s international secretariat, said: “Governments have a historic opportunity to secure a UN convention with teeth and global reach.”

But other have argued that in attempting to take on too much, the delegates would end up with an instrument no one fully agrees to, resulting in a convention not respected in practice.

The US is concerned about calls to extend the convention’s ambit to criminalising private-sector corruption.

A US government official explains that: “We are not against the convention dealing with the private sector. It is just that when it comes to defining what conduct is criminal, we need to be careful when we start making globally applicable, legally binding rules.”

According to him, “What qualifies as criminal in purely private conduct, and how you get to it in the most effective way, has not been very thoroughly fleshed out. We feel we are
testing out new tools (in the US). The convention has enough to bite off dealing with the public sector.”

But TI has thrown its weight behind the position of other delegates that the convention must address private-sector corruption, as “tolerance of corruption in this sector undermines public confidence and can thwart sustainable development.”

African Union Adopts Convention to Prevent, Combat Corruption

The African Union (AU) has adopted a convention to combat corruption following professed concern by African leaders about the negative effects of corruption and impunity on the political, economic, social and cultural stability in African states and its devastating effects on development.

The Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, the first “corruption specific” African regional instrument, was adopted by African Heads of State and Governments at their summit which took place in Maputo, Mozambique, last month. It requires the ratification of at least 15 countries to come into force.

See Media Rights Monitor, Vol. 7 No. 11 of November 2002 for full text of the convention.

The objectives of the Convention are to:

♦ Promote and strengthen the development in Africa by each state party of mechanisms required to prevent, detect, punish and eradicate corruption and related offences in the public and private sectors.
♦ Promote, facilitate and regulate cooperation among the state parties to ensure the effectiveness of measures and actions to prevent, punish and eradicate corruption and related offences in Africa.
♦ Coordinate and harmonise the policies and legislation between state parties for the purposes of prevention, detection, punishment and eradication of corruption on the continent.
♦ Promote socio-economic development by removing obstacles to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights.
♦ Establish the necessary conditions to foster transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs.

The Convention enjoins each state party to adopt such legislative and other measures to give effect to the right of access to any information that is required to assist in the fight against corruption and related offences.

By ratifying the Convention, each state party also undertakes to create an enabling environment that will allow civil society and the media to hold governments to the highest levels of transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs as well as consult with and provide for the participation of civil society in the monitoring process of the implementation of the Convention.

The Convention imposes an obligation of state parties to adopt legislative and other measures to prohibit the use of funds acquired through illegal and corrupt practices to finance political parties and incorporate the principles of transparency in the funding of political parties.

The Convention was initially approved by ministers of the relevant departments in the various member countries at the AU’s Ministerial Conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, between September 18 and 19, last year. It was later approved by the Executive Council of the AU at its meeting held in Ndjamen, Chad, between March 5 and 6, this year. It was adopted at the AU Heads of State summit in Maputo last month.
NICOMM 2003, Telecom Exhibition, Holds in October

The 9th edition of the annual telecommunications exhibition organized by Association of Telecommunications Companies of Nigeria (ATCON), tagged NICOMM 2003 will hold from October 13 to 15 at MUSON Centre, Lagos.

Confirming the date, President of The Association, Engr. Charles Joseph said NICOMM 2003 promises to be an assembly of world-class telecom vendors and manufacturers just as it will parade the newest big names in the local scene.

Already it is confirmed that Globacom, Mobile Telecommunication Services Ltd (MTS), Nigeria Telecommunications Ltd (NITEL), Oduatel, Cyberspace, Swift Networks, Startech Connections are some of the current contenders for a wide space within the Nigerian telecommunications scene and NICOMM 2003 is seen as the first significant outing for international showcasing of the solutions they offer.

Analysts also look forward to using the event to measure the amount of restructuring which the new managers of NITEL have achieved as NITEL is expected to, for the first time, flaunt its hidden technology treasures and in particular the SAT-3 etc. in place of its annual display of mundane accessories such as telephone terminals and recharge cards at big time international exhibitions.

MFWA Protest Continued Closure of Radio Station

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has expressed grave concerns about the continued closure of the Citizen FM radio station in Banjul, The Gambia. The Accra, Ghana-based media freedom and free expression organization in a statement described the continued closure of the radio station as “illegal” and “arbitrary”.

According to the Foundation, for more than two years now, the government of President Yahya Jammeh has stopped the Citizen FM from broadcasting on a false claim that the proprietor has not paid his taxes and license fees. Describing the accusation as a “blatant fabrication”, the Foundation said the station has neither been charged to court, nor been ordered by any court to cease broadcasting, on this accusation by the authorities.

The organization, therefore accused President Yahyah A. A. Jameh of interior motives to stop Citizen FM radio from carrying on its broadcasting activities.

According to MFWA, Citizen FM radio station and its owner have been harassed and attacked with impunity since it was established. It recounted that about five years ago, armed security personnel raided and forcibly shut down the station.

On February 5, 1998, the proprietor of Citizen FM, Baboucar M. Gaye, was arrested together with his news editor, Ebrima Sillah, and detained for several days at the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) in Banjul following a news item broadcast on the station the previous night. The news item had allegedly implicated an officer at the NIA, Lamin Jobarteh, in an alleged counterfeit scandal. Jobarteh exercised his constitutional right to a rejoinder and his reaction was given the requisite publicity on the radio and in print.

But two days later, on February 7, 1998, the station was forcibly closed down and armed guards stationed on the premises. Baboucar Gaye was charged to court under a 1913 telegraphic law for allegedly operating a radio station without a valid licence, a charge he denied. Ironically, the 1913 Act is an archaic colonial law passed before radio broadcasting was introduced to the country.

However, on August 28, 1998, a magistrate court ruled that the station and its equipment be forfeited to the state.

On April 17, 2000, after two years of protracted litigation, a High Court in Banjul heard Mr. Gaye’s appeal. Justice Wallace Grante, Judge of the High Court of the Gambia, quashed the
earlier ruling by the Magistrate Court and ordered the Inspector General of Police to return the station’s equipment within seven days. According to Justice Grant, Gaye was convicted under a colonial legal relic which, measured against the Gambia’s legal regime today, was “not known in law.”

Following the court ruling, the station resumed operation for a brief period and was shut down again by the security operatives on an allegation of non-payment of taxes. Mr. Gaye has denied this and has proof of compliance with the regulations.

MFWA noted that the refusal of the Gambia authorities to comply with the High Court ruling is a worrying testament of the intolerant and authoritarian posture of President Yahya Jameh’s government, which it said is a threat to media freedom and freedom of expression in the country.

MFWA, therefore, called on the government of President Jameh to hands off Citizen FM, and demonstrate a respect for the rule of law and media freedom in the The Gambia.

Internews To Train Journalists

Internews an international nonprofit organization that supports open media worldwide will in the week of 1-6 September in Abuja the Federal Capital Territory, train radio journalists to report HIV/AIDS issues qualitatively and adequately.

Funded by USAID the Internews Local Voices the first of such training programme seeks to improve the capacity of radio journalists, programme presenters, disc jockeys and radio station managers to evolve and produce HIV/AIDS-centred programmes.

Local Voices is designed to support journalists in creating high quality, locally relevant coverage of HIV and AIDS issues for audiences in Nigeria. Internews believes when journalists can go beyond reporting on statistics and begin to explore the factors that make people in our society vulnerable to HIV, we can help to erode the taboos and stigma related to talking about AIDS in public.

For further information on this training program and other Internews activities, please contact: Charles Onyekatu or Cece Modupe Fadope on 09-4134998 or cece@internews.org

Free Expression Experts Plan For ‘Media And Peace’ In West Africa

Representatives of media establishments, national, regional and international press freedom organisations as well as United Nations agencies met in Accra, Ghana, last month to develop a practical programme for media and peace in West Africa.

The stakeholders planning meeting for the “West Africa Media Partnership Initiative on a Regional Programme of Media and Peace”, held on July 8 to 10, was attended by representatives of 19 organisations. It was organized by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) in collaboration with the Copenhagen-based International Media Support (IMS), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Other organisations represented at the meeting included the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA) based in Senegal, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) from Nigeria, the Geneva-based Media Action International (MAI), the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), and other journalist associations from Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire.

The meeting examined the situation of the media in civil conflicts. Specifically, in determining what potential avenues for supporting media in conflict should be, the meeting examined the following issues:
Media Limitations: issues relating to the capacity of the media to cover a conflict and the potential limitations that may be imposed, including conditions for effective media performance; capacity for effective coverage of humanitarian problems; possible international convention for protection of journalists during conflict, such as mechanisms for “media in exile”.

Media Performance: issues relating to capacity development and professional standards, including skills and resources; journalism ethics; social responsibilities and relevance; capacity for promoting peace; coverage of transitional processes and transitional justice mechanisms.

Media Rights: issues relating to the conditions and promotion of press freedoms and rights, including monitoring, advocacy, and legislative reform.

Media Structures: issues relating to the creation and support of media institutions and associations for the promotion and protection of media independence.

Media Functions: issues relating to the coverage of topics and events, with a specific focus on those pertaining to peace, including capacities for effective early warning; dealing with social, economic and political factors; and developments that provoke violent conflicts.

Media Safety: issues relating to safety and protection of media and journalists during periods of tension and conflict, including mechanisms for local and international interventions for physical and political protection.

Media Resources: issues relating to media infrastructure rehabilitation and reconstruction; media human resources rehabilitation and reintegration, such as professional support for returnee exiled journalists; as well as rehabilitation and development of training programmes and institutions.

The participants drew up plans for a regional programme aimed at improving the media’s capacity to promote peace. While agreeing that interventions should take into account regional implications and consequences, they said immediate attention needed to be paid to the situation in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire.

The participants agreed that the evolving conflicts in West Africa required the collaborative commitment of organisations active in the region on issues of media and peace as well as the mobilisation and deployment of intervention strategies along a common, coordinated and comprehensive platform.

They identified several short-term needs, including safety mechanisms for journalists, capacity building for media, and training on conflict reporting. Longer term plans include the creation of legal defence funds for journalists, baseline needs assessment studies and legislative reforms to promote press freedom and media pluralism.

The MFWA is working with IMS to develop a regional programme on media and peace, which will serve as a guideline for UN agencies, including UNESCO and OCHA to develop their programmes in West Africa.

**WAN Forecasts Bleak Outlook For Press Freedom In 2003**

The World Association of Newspapers (WAN) is forecasting a bleak outlook for press freedom around the world for this year.

At its annual world congress held in Dublin, Ireland, WAN released its half-year review of press-freedom worldwide saying an alarming number of journalists were killed and repression had increased in a number of countries.

It said: “It was a deadly start of the year for journalists covering conflict, with the war in Iraq killing at least 13 journalists. Five journalists have been murdered in Colombia since January in the civil conflict that has killed over 30 journalists in the last decade.”
Since November 2002, another 13 journalists have been killed around the world, including in India, Ivory Coast, the Philippines and the Palestinian Authority Territories, bringing the total during the period to 31.

WAN highlighted the situation in Cuba, where 28 journalists were sentenced in April to prison terms of between 14 and 27 years. The journalists were accused by the state of “working with a foreign power to undermine the government.”

In Asia, imprisonment remains the biggest threat to free media in many parts of the region, with China topping the list with at least 40 journalists known to be in jail. Meanwhile, in the Middle East and in North Africa, criminal defamation laws appear to be the weapon of choice against the media in Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt.

RSF Suspended From UN Rights Commission

The consultative status of the Paris-based free expression organisation, Reporters Without Borders, with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights was suspended last month for one year at the request of Libya and Cuba.

Reporters Without Borders, better known with its French acronym, RSF, was suspended on July 24 because activists with the organisation staged a protest during the inauguration of the Commission’s last session in March against the decision to let Libya chair the commission.

Reporters Without Borders, one of the few press freedom organisations to have consultative status with ECOSOC, insists that granting the chair to Col. Gaddafi’s regime has been a disgrace to the Commission.

But the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the body that took this decision, did not invite Reporters Without Borders to explain its action. The failure to respect sanction procedures has been criticised by the French government, which lodged a request for a postponement of any decision to suspend the organisation.

Reporters Without Borders last month published a report entitled “Wheeling and Dealing”, which detailed the excesses, shortcomings and alleged accelerating decline of the Commission, arguing that dictatorships such as Cuba and China have taken it over in order to strip it of all substance.

The report proposes a series of reforms that are essential if the Commission is to be rescued, including limiting the right to vote to those states that have ratified the main international human rights covenants, naming an independent human rights expert to chair the Commission, and abolishing the so-called “non-action” motions that have repeatedly been used to block debates.

IPC Gets Improved Internet Connection, Plans Special Programme For Journalists

The International Press Centre (IPC), Lagos as part of its efforts at giving necessary support to the media and all practicing journalists has just finished the installation of its new V-Sat equipment at its premises at 42, Ijaye Road, Caterpillar Bus Stop, Ogba-IjayeRoad, Lagos State.

The V-Sat facility, acquired with the support of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) is also linking three other media NGOs to the net via Internet radio connection. The three NGOs, which are partners in the Media For Democracy (MFD) project in Nigeria, are Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Independent Journalism Centre (IJC) and Journalists for Democratic Rights (JODER).

The IPC with this new and faster Internet link is now capable of providing better internet facilities to journalists, researchers, conflict managers, students of schools of journalism and
other professionals that need the Internet for their professional and personal needs. The IPC cyber café, which opens from 9.00 am to 7.00pm on weekdays and 10.00am to 5.00pm on Saturdays will now give priorities to journalists and researchers.

A Computer Assisted Reports and Research (CARR) training programme for journalists and other NGO workers has also been designed and will soon commence at the Centre.

Africa Alert! Africa Alert!! Africa Alert!!!

Togo

Detained Journalists Released

Three private media practitioners, held at the Lome civilian prison for nearly five weeks, have been released. Dimas Dzikodo, Editor; Philippe Evegnon, Managing Director of the L’Evenement newspaper and Jean de Dieu Kpakpala, a reporter with the Nouvel Echo weekly, were ordered released on July 22, 2003 by the Lome Magistrate Court.

The journalists were arrested and detained on June 14, 2003 for ‘attempting to publish false information’. Dzikodo was arrested at an internet cafe where he had gone to scan the photos of some persons who were alleged victims of police repression of opposition demonstrations in Agou, in the plateaux region of Togo, following the controversial June 1, 2003 Presidential Elections in Togo. Philippe Evegnon and Kpakpala were later arrested on June 15 on the same charge. The disputed elections returned Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who has been head of state since 1966, to office on another seven-year mandate.

The journalists were arraigned before a Lomé high court on charges of “publishing false information and disturbing public order” and were promptly remanded in prison custody.

According to Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)-Togo, the court ruled that Philippe Evegnon and Jean de Dieu Kpakpala had no case to answer and set them free while Dzikodo was found guilty of ‘attempting to spread false information’. He was fined 500,000 CFA francs and also given a 12-month suspended sentence for disturbing public order. On Thursday July 24, Dzikodo was sent home only after borrowing the money to settle the fine.

Angered that the authorities were keeping them in prison for over a month without making progress in the case, the journalists began a 48-hour hunger strike, starting July 14, 2003. The three detainees say they want to draw public attention to the illegality of their continued detention without trial.

The three journalists had been detained for 11 days at the premises of the criminal investigation department (CID) in Lomé, where they were physically tortured daily, before being transferred to the civilian prison. A week after their incarceration at the CID, and following public agitation, Dzikodo and Avégnon were shown to the media. But Kpakpala was not shown. The CID Commissioner, Têko Koudouovoh Mawuli refused to answer queries from journalists about him.

Later in a communiqué, the Police claimed that the pictures were those of “road accident victims”; and that, “by publishing [pictures] as proof of an alleged repression of a demonstration, the accused were distorting the truth, misinforming public opinion and inciting communities to revolt and vengeance.”

The journalists denied the charges.

Liberia

Journalists Attacked, Displaced And Living In Fear

21
Following the recent incursions (and subsequent retreat) of LURD rebels into Monrovia, capital of Liberia, residents of the Duala and New Kru Town suburbs have been subjected to a reign of terror, alleged to be mainly perpetrated by government forces.

Journalists and human rights activists in Monrovia have been the worst victims of what appears to be the targeted and systematic looting, arson and rape of residents caught up in the raging conflict.

Independent journalist, Lyndon Ponnie, narrowly escaped death when armed men attacked his home on Thursday, June 12 and robbed him of every possession. He now passes the night at his office in central Monrovia. The whereabouts of his family are not known. Ponnie, who is the former editor of The Concord Times newspaper, has been a constant victim of harassment and death threats for allegedly embarking on a campaign to discredit the government of President Charles Taylor. It will be recalled that in 1999, The Concord Times, relying on the Auditor General’s annual report, published a series of articles that pointed to corruption in government. The paper was banned by Taylor’s government in 2000.

Two investigative reporters of the independent The News newspaper, Bobby Tapson and Bill Jarkloh, as well as Joe Watson of the state-owned Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS), were abducted on Thursday June 12 (and released almost one week later) by the LURD rebels.

Stanley McGill, another reporter with The News was earlier, on Thursday, June 5, 2003, assaulted by armed men who brutalized him and confiscated his laptop.

A week before, on Tuesday May 27, 2003, he was attacked by three armed men wearing uniforms of the Presidential elite guard, the Anti Terrorist Unit (ATU) who robbed him of personal effects, and left with a “promise” to “get back”. He is currently in hiding.

The homes of journalists Philip Moore, editor-in-chief of The Independent newspaper; Charles Asumana, The Inquirers; and Kaba Williams have been looted and set ablaze.

More than 25 journalists have been displaced by the fighting in Monrovia. Several others are unable to locate family members, who have, themselves, been victims of the reprisals.

The mother of Patrick Wolokpor, a reporter with the independent Inquirer newspaper was shot and killed by elements of the ATU when she protested the killing of her dog by the soldiers.

Three nieces of Ishmael P Campbell, human rights advocate and Vice President of the Liberia Bar Association, were assaulted and sexually abused. His home was looted, and he is reported to be in hiding.

Guinea

Journalists Assaulted

Azoca Bah, reporter with the Le Lynx la Lance Group and Aboubakar Akoumba, managing editor of the weekly L’Aurore newspaper were, on Friday, June 27, 2003, assaulted by armed soldiers of the presidential guard. Their documents, together with Bah’s camera and films, were also seized and crushed under foot.

The incident occurred in Touba, a provincial town 400 km north-east of the capital, Conakry, where the Bah and Akoumba had gone to cover a Koran-reading session for the health of President Lansana Conté and a demonstration by supporters of his candidature in the next elections.

Organizers of the rally were outraged by the presence of the two reporters, whose newspapers they accused of carrying irreverent reports about the President in their previous editions.

It would be recalled that Benn Pepito, editor-in-chief and Cellou Diallo, paparazzo, of the “La Lance” newspaper, were summoned and questioned for three consecutive days on the 24, 25 and 26 March, 2003, over a photograph of President Lansana Conté, carried in the Issue
No. 325 of the paper. Earlier, on March 18, 2003, officials of the Internal Security Service (DST) physically assaulted and excluded Bah and Diallo from a meeting of journalists called by Gen. Conté at the presidential palace.

There were speculation and public debate about the health of the President fueled by the campaign, spearheaded by Elhadj Fodé Soumah, patron of the ruling Party for Unity and Progress (PUP), for the re-election bid of President Conté. Gen. Conté has been head of state in Guinea since 1984 when he led a military coup to take over government following the death of Sékou Touré.

COL Calls For Papers On Open Learning Conference

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is calling for submissions of papers for its third biennial Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning. The deadline for submitting abstracts of proposed papers to COL has been extended to 30 September 2003. Upon acceptance of abstracts, papers will be required by 22 December 2003.

The Forum will be held in Dunedin, New Zealand, from 4 to 8 July 2004, hosted by the Distance Education Association of New Zealand in collaboration with the Federation of Commonwealth Open and Distance Learning Associations. The conference theme is ‘Building Learning Communities for our Millennium: Reaching Wider Audiences through Innovative Approaches’. Sub-themes include Education, Health and Local Government. Papers may be on any of the conference’s themes.

COL has also issued a call for submissions for its biennial Excellence in Distance Education Awards programme. The Awards recognise and honour excellence achieved at an institutional level, in the development of learning materials and in student accomplishment. As a part of the Awards programme, COL also designates individuals as Honorary Fellows of COL, as a tribute to their lifetime’s work as a ‘distance educator’.

This third Awards presentation will take place at the Pan-Commonwealth Forum in Dunedin next year.

ARTICLE 19 Concerned About “Right Of Reply” On The Internet

ARTICLE 19 has raised concerns about proposals from the Council of Europe’s Media Division to establish a “right of reply” on the Internet. Under a draft recommendation, all online publications that are “frequently updated” and contain “edited information of public interest” should grant an enforceable right of reply to individuals whose rights have been affected by inaccurate factual statements, notes ARTICLE 19. The only exception would be for websites “operated by individuals.”

The recommendation fails to recognise the differences between the Internet and “traditional” print and broadcast media, says ARTICLE 19. Under the proposal, websites run by human rights organisations or political parties would be obliged to grant a right of reply to those who allege that their rights have been infringed by incorrect factual statements. “For example, the administrator of the website of a human rights organisation would have to grant space to the spokesperson of a military dictatorship to respond to alleged factual inaccuracies that may be impossible to verify,” says ARTICLE 19.

ARTICLE 19 fears that such a right of reply would be “an unacceptable restriction on editorial freedom” and “open to wide abuse.” Governments or other powerful figures would be able to crack down on critical websites by launching abusive requests, using up these organisations’ limited resources.
ARTICLE 19 sees no “pressing social need” that would justify such a right of reply, just as it has never been necessary to impose such a right in relation to books or pamphlets. The organisation is urging the Council of Europe to ensure that any right of reply with regard to Internet publications be voluntary and limited to actual mass media organisations.

ATTACKS ON THE PRESS IN JULY 2003

JNI Endorses Fatwa on Journalists

The committee set up by the umbrella Islamic body, Jama’atu Nasr Islam (JNI) to investigate the Fatwa (death sentence) imposed on the publisher of ThisDay newspapers, Mr. Nduka Obaigbena and Miss Isioma Daniel, its ex-style Editor, for the publication that allegedly led to November 2002 protests against the hosting of the Miss World pageant, on July 21 endorsed the death sentence in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria.

The endorsement of the fatwa is contained in the annual report by JNI’s Secretary-General, Justice Abdulkadir Orire (rtd) to the organization’s central council. The Fatwa committee found both Mr. Obaigbena and Miss Daniel guilty of insulting the person of the Prophet Mohammed and stated that “Anyone who castigates the person of the Prophet… should be executed and his pardon should never be accepted and … the judgment falls squarely on anybody whether he is a Moslem or non-Moslem”.

The newspaper had issued a comprehensive apology due to the article’s allegedly blasphemous nature, its Kaduna office was burned down by a group of protesters and the Kano State Assembly banned the newspaper.

Task Force Men Harass Newspaper Vendors

Members of the Imo State Task force on road decongestion have taken to harassing newspapers and magazines vendors in Owerri the state capital. The Task Force men in their raids impound and take away papers displayed for sale and also destroy some.

The Newspapers and Magazines Distributors Council, Owerri, the newsvendors’ umbrella body, in a letter addressed to governor Achike Udenwa, signed by the secretary Uma Igwe, appealed to the Governor to prevail on the members of the task force to stop harassing its members.

The council said “we wish to draw your attention to the malicious destruction of our newspapers and magazines by the task force on road decongestion. It is a recognized fact that newsstands are usually given special status all over the world. So, we were taken aback when the said task force destroyed our papers which were displayed on a stand behind the gutter.”

The council pleaded with the governor to intervene and stop the wanton destruction of their means of livelihood adding that they had tried to make the task force see reasons to no avail.

Igwe recalled a case in point when a vendor, Chibuzor Chukwukere, who had a stand in front of Saint Paul’s Catholic church on Douglas Road, Owerri was beaten up, his newsstand destroyed and papers taken away by the task force. Some individuals, including newsmen had tried to prevail on the members of the task force and their chairman to stop the destruction since the newsstand was behind the gutter but they went ahead and destroyed it.

For over one week, vendors in Owerri have had their papers confiscated and others destroyed by the task force on road decongestion.

The vendors maintained that their papers neither generate waste as the unsold ones are normally returned to the publishers nor do they display their papers on the road but behind the culverts and so they ought not be harassed.
TELL Editors Allege Threat To Lives

On July 31, the management of TELL Communications Limited, publishers of TELL, alerted the public to the activities of some unknown persons whom it say have been threatening its editors and directors.

The statement said the threats came through anonymous telephone calls and the movements of shadowy persons around the company premises as well as homes of editors and directors.

Police Brutalize Journalists

Men of the Nigerian Police on July 1, in Abuja accosted three journalists beating one of them to a state of stupor.

The journalists, Mrs. Funmi Komolafe, Labour Editor of Vanguard newspaper, Mr. Rotimi Ajayi, also a reporter for the Vanguard newspaper, and Mr. George Oshodi, a photojournalist with Associated Press (AP) were covering the strike called by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) to protest the fuel price hike by the Federal government. The attack came barely 24 hours after police arrested and released Mrs. Komolafe and Mr. Ola Awoniyi of Agence France Presse (AFP).

Mr. Oshodi was severely injured in one of his eyes on account of the brutal beating he received from the policemen numbering about 12.

The policemen beat the journalist with the butt of their guns, whips and blows to every parts of his body. They also tore Mrs. Komolafe’s identification papers and also tear-gassed the journalists.

Mr. Oshodi was as a result admitted at a hospital in Abuja for treatment.

Mr. Adams Oshiomhole, President of the Nigeria Labour Congress, later took Mrs. Komolafe and Mr. Ajayi to the Force Headquarters to see the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tofa Balogun.

The NUJ thereafter issued a 72-hour ultimatum to the police to apologise to it and refund N600.00 (Six Hundred Naira) for the shattered camera of one of its members or face litigation.

Police Arrest and Detain TheNews Magazine Reporter

The Taraba State correspondent of TheNews magazine, Mr. Ben Adaji was on July 22 arrested by policemen on the orders and supervision of the state Police Commissioner, Nwachukwu Egbochukwu. According to a statement by Mr. Demola Balogun, Corporate Affairs Manager of Independent Communication Network limited, publishers of the magazine, Policemen arrested the journalist at the Government House, Jalingo, the state capital, where he had gone to interview some government officials.

The arrest came barely 24 hours after a police team stormed the Lagos offices of the magazine on July 21 demanding to see the editor over this week’s edition of the magazine, dated July 28. The lead story of the edition of the magazine focused on what the magazine called the many shady deals by the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun.

The police team led by the Lagos state police command Public Relations Officer, Mr. Ighodalo, left instruction that the editor should report to the office of the Lagos State Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Adaji’s arrest and detention was linked to a report he wrote, published in the July 21 edition of the magazine entitled: Abacha In Police Uniform. The story x-rayed the conduct of the state police commissioner and concluded that they were less than decorous.

Reports have it that Mr. Adaji was arraigned before a court without the benefit of legal representation and was subsequently remanded in prison custody. He is still being held in prison custody at the time of going to the press.
Mr. Adaji was first arrested on June 29, on a trumped-up charge of defamation of character along with the Taraba State chairman of Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Silas Jafta, as a result of the planned strike against fuel increase. He was released after some hours. The police commissioner also issued verbal threat to deal ruthlessly with Mr. Adaji whom he referred to as his number one enemy in the state.

**Police Orderly Assaults Journalist**

A photojournalist with ThisDay newspaper, Mr. Sunday Aghaeze was on July 25 physically assaulted by a police orderly at the premises of an Abuja Federal High Court on the orders of Justice Samuel Wilson Egbo-Egbo.

Mr. Aghaeze had attempted to take photo shots of Justice Egbo-Egbo while he was alighting from his official car but on seeing him take position, Egbo-Egbo asked his orderly why he was not doing his job and immediately, the police orderly jumped on Sunday and tried to wrest his camera from him.

In the course of the struggle, the digital camera was damaged and Sunday’s shirt torn. The intervention of judicial reporters in the court premises ensured that the camera was not seized. They engaged the police and court officials in verbal exchanges.

Justice Wilson Egbo-Egbo made headline over some controversial injunctions he gave. The most recent being his July 22 order to the governor of Anambra state to cease parading himself as such despite the constitutional immunity that insulates the governor against legal action. He was to rescind the order two days later following public outcry and blamed it on “printer’s error”.

President of the Nigeria Society of Photojournalists, Mr. Summi Smart-Cole, threatened to institute legal action against the judge if the relevant authorities failed to address the assault.

**MEDIA / PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS**

**Nominations Invited For Award For Rights Defenders**

The Martin Ennals Foundation is accepting nominations for the 2004 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders. Nominations for the 2004 award should be received no later than October 1.

Each year, the prestigious award honours an individual or an organisation for exceptional courage in combating human rights violations. It carries a cash prize of CHF 20,000 (about US$15,000).

Established in 1993 in honour of former Amnesty International Secretary General Martin Ennals, the award aims to encourage individuals and organisations working in conditions hostile to human rights.

To be eligible, nominees must be currently working in the area of human rights. Special attention is paid to those demonstrating a record of combating human rights violations through courageous and innovative means. They cannot nominate themselves. The winner will be chosen by an international jury composed of 10 human rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch.

The nomination form may be completed online at: http://www.martinennalsaward.org/en/nomination/index.html

**Awards For Freelance Television Cameramen**

The Rory Peck Awards, the only prize in the world honouring freelance camera operators working in television news, is accepting entries for the 2003 competition. Freelancers can
apply for awards in four categories - features; hard news; broadcast images; and outstanding contribution to the work of freelancers.

The awards are named in honour of British camera operator Rory Peck, who was killed in October 1993 while covering the attempted October coup in Moscow.

The awards are administered by the Rory Peck Trust, which works to promote the work, safety and security of freelance media workers in news and current affairs broadcasting worldwide. The Trust subsidises training in hostile environments for freelancers, advises them on insurance and provides financial support to the families of those killed or seriously injured during the course of their work.

To apply for the awards, visit: http://rorypecktrust.org

Woodrow Wilson International Center Calls for Academic Proposals

The Center awards academic year residential fellowships to individuals with outstanding proposals in a broad range of the social sciences and humanities on national and/or international issues topics that intersect with questions of public policy or provide the historical and/or cultural framework to illumine policy issues of contemporary importance.

Fellows should be prepared to interact with policymakers in Washington and with Wilson Center staff who are working on similar topics. Applications from any country are welcome. Applicants with outstanding capabilities and experience from a wide variety of backgrounds (including government, the corporate world, and the professions, as well as academia) are eligible for appointment.

Stipends provided in 2001 ranged from $29,500 to $73,000. In 2002-2003, the Center expects to be able to award a few fellowships at a higher stipend level, up to a maximum of $85,000. Fellows are provided private offices, access to the Library of Congress, Windows-based personal computers, and research assistants.

Interested individuals should contact Selection and Services Office, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, One Woodrow Wilson Plaza, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004-3027; Tel: (202) 691-4170; Fax: (202) 691-4001; E-mail: fellowships@wwic.si.edu; Web site: http://www.wilsoncenter.org

Four African Journalists Nominated For Natali Prize

Four African journalists have been nominated for the 2003 Natali Prize for Journalism of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). The winners, to be announced later this year, will receive a U.S. $10,000 award at a special ceremony this October in Brussels, Belgium.

South African journalists Jessica Bezuidenhout and Mzilikaza Wa Afrika were nominated for their investigation, published in the Sunday Times, of South Africa’s first forestry privatization deals. Nominations were also announced for Ken Opala of Kenya for his series in the Daily Nation on the death penalty, and Dorothy Otieno, also of Kenya, for her East African Standard articles on genital mutilation.

An independent jury of nine media and human rights experts drew up the shortlist of nominees on July 25 in Brussels. Twelve other journalists from the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean are also in line for the five Natali awards.

The Natali Prize for Journalism: Excellence in Reporting Human Rights, Democracy and Development was established in 1992 by the European Commission to promote quality journalism as a bulwark of democracy and human rights. It is organized by the IFJ, the world’s largest journalist organization, representing more than 500,000 journalists worldwide.

“With over 300 entries from all corners of the world, this year’s Natali Prize encompasses a multitude of diverse cultures,” said Aidan White, general secretary of the IFJ. “The Natali Prize has solidified itself as a true representation of courage personified.... creating
a unique opportunity to showcase a rich and extraordinary field of talented writers and reporters.”

**CPU Offers Political Reporting Course For West Africans**

Senior West African reporters, planning to enter the often-contentious world of political reporting, can sign-up for a free distance-learning course underwritten by the Commonwealth Press Union (CPU). The virtual course is designed for senior journalists living in Cameroon, the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria or Sierra Leone.

The course will seek to teach practical skills and techniques, and is structured around eight modules including Introduction to political journalism; Political agenda setters and how to build contacts with them; Reporting political rallies and speeches; Writing a political scene; and Reporting surveys and opinion polls. The other modules are Globalization and external influences on politics; The role of electoral commissions; and Writing a political column.

Priority will go to fulltime journalists working for a newspaper or news agency that is already a member of the CPU. Journalists from other publication will only be considered should space be available. For additional information, contact CPU training director Jane Rangeley. Telephone (+44-20) 7583-7733. Fax (+44-20) 7583-6868. E-mail at jane@cpu.org.uk.

Candidates can apply online at www.cpulearning.com/p1temp.asp?pid=7&page=1. CPU’s virtual training Web site can be viewed at: www.cpu.org.uk/distance_learning.html.

**Dow Jones Newspaper Fund Welcome Proposals**

The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund welcomes unsolicited proposals for grants that are directly related to the foundation’s mission of encouraging students to pursue careers in journalism. The Fund does not award grants to publish commercial newspapers or finance special events.

The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund was founded in 1958 by editors of The Wall Street Journal to improve the quality of journalism education and the pool of applicants for jobs in the newspaper business. It provides internships and scholarships to college students, career literature, fellowships for high school journalism teachers and publications’ advisers and training for college journalism instructors. The Fund is a nonprofit foundation supported by the Dow Jones Foundation, Dow Jones & Company, Inc. and other newspaper companies. Grant proposals must be submitted not later than October 1 of each year to allow ample time for consideration by the Newspaper Fund’s board of directors. Earlier notification of intent to submit proposals is encouraged.

Program applications, proposal guidelines and information can be obtained in the Forms section of its web site http://DJNewspaperFund.dowjones.com/fund/FormList.asp or by contacting: The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, Inc., P.O. Box 300, Princeton, NJ 08543-0300, Phone: (609) 452-2820, E-mail: newsfund@wsj.dowjones.com
“Freedom of Expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of a [democratic] society, one of the basic conditions for its progress and for the development of every man.”

European Court of Human Rights, Judgment December 7, 1976, Series A, No.24; 1 European Human Rights Record

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