Pressure Mounts For Community Broadcasting In Nigeria

The agitation for a total democratization of the broadcast sector of the Nigerian media through the introduction of community broadcasting, has heighten. All through the year, numerous persons made a case for the promotion of community broadcasting in Nigeria. The matter was also a subject of discussion at several fora. Among these forums was the Roundtable Conference convened by Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) on August 27 and 28, at Chelsea Hotel in Abuja. According to OSIWA, the objective of the roundtable, which brought together individuals and organizations from across Nigeria, was to share perspectives on the role of community radio in Nigeria and to develop a framework for the establishment of community radio stations, if thought feasible.

Earlier, Media Rights Agenda (MRA), as part of efforts to ensure that the legal framework for media practice in Nigeria conforms with international standards, had convened series of technical workshops comprising core stakeholders in the industry at which a comprehensive media law draft bill was prepared. The draft bill also provides for a legal regime for the promotion of community broadcasting in Nigeria.

Another initiative was undertaken by Independent Journalism Centre (IJC) in collaboration with Friederich Ebert Foundation. The organisation has conducted two workshops for this purpose. The first workshop was held between May 16 and 17, 2001, at Ilorin, Kwara state capital while the second one held between November 1 and 2, at Gate way hotel at Ijebu Ode.

The objective of the initiative is to establish a pilot Community Radio Project in Nigeria. The initiative has provoked advocacy efforts intended to get the National Assembly to pass a law which will encourage a regime of community broadcasting in Nigeria.

The meetings led to the setting up of a committee to work on the aspects relating to community broadcasting in the media bill presented to the national Assembly by Media Rights Agenda. It also stipulated a timeframe within which the activities for the enactment of relevant laws would have been achieved.

The agitation for the advent of community broadcasting in Nigeria is in spite of the success so far recorded by private broadcasting houses, licensed in Nigeria since the...
broadcasting deregulation process kicked off in 1992. This is because a yawning gap remains open in the area of participatory and community broadcasting.

Although, the broadcasting regulatory body, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) talks eloquently about the social / cultural objectives of the licenced broadcasting stations, the commercial pursuits of the new stations have drowned the projected socio-cultural objectives of the stations.

Yet, it has been established, the world over, that community radio or television remains the most important vehicle of getting the people to voice their desires and send vital information that can impact positively on a given society.

While it may be said that the realization of this fact led to the broadcasting deregulation exercise which started with the promulgation of the NBC decree No. 38 of 1992, it is sad to note that the objectives have not been pursued with the anticipated openness and sincerity.

The licensing process remains vague and shrouded in secrecy as the NBC only merely recommends approval to the Head of State, through the Minister of Information.

Besides, although the law setting up the NBC states categorically that the body shall consist a board headed by a chairman and nine other members who "shall be persons of proven integrity, experienced and specialized knowledge in the broadcasting industry…", the NBC has been run by a government appointed Director-General who, himself, cannot operate independently. Government only recently constituted a board of directors for the commission following wide spread criticism and a suit instituted against it by MRA.

The programme contents of existing radio and television stations, have been formulated in such a manner that participatory programmes are few and far between. The new private stations and the old ones run by the federal and state governments have made the pursuit of money their priority.

In Lagos for instance, has witnessed the arrival of several private radio stations since 1994. Among these are Ray Power 100.5 FM 1 and Raypower 106.5 FM 2, Rhythm 93 FM, Star FM, Cool FM, Africa independent Television, Channels Television and Murhi International Television, all privately owned.

These stations are competing in a market which already had Radio Nigeria (RN2) now Metro FM, Radio Nigeria 3 FM (RN3), and Radio Nigeria 1 (RN1), Eko FM, NTA Channel 10, NTA 2 Channel 5, as well as the Ogun State owned OGBC 2 FM which signal is loud and clear in Lagos. Private radio stations are locked in a big competition for the advertisers money which has left members of the public at their mercies.

As Nigeria steps into the blissful air of the democratic pole, one issue that is bordering the people is how to sustain the democratic evolution come 2003 when new elections expected to consolidate the gains so far achieved would take place.

This fear has made more Nigerians to step up the call for a more liberalized broadcasting situation in order to bring the radio and television closer to the people. It is believed that a more liberalized broadcasting regime in Nigeria, through the encouragement of community broadcasting, will improve information flow and increase the tempo of participation in the evolving democratic process.

Besides this general argument, Mr. Friday Aizeboje, project director of Sollex international, an IT and management consulting group that is championing the concept of community broadcasting, said community broadcasting will serve to promote the cultural heritage of the Nigerian people.

Perhaps, the most vital achievement a more liberalized broadcasting system can bestow on Nigeria, will be the de-mystification of the radio as government's political tool. The popular opinion in Nigeria is that if communities are allowed access to radio facilities and they are allowed to design their own programmes and run such stations the way it would benefit them, they could employ their radio or television houses to defend democracy and resist the coups and political manipulations frequently executed by the use of state broadcasting facilities. The
existence of this possibility will, itself, act as insurance against coups and self-serving political grandstanding.

Beyond this, the government run broadcasting houses and the privately licenced ones, are all concentrated in the urban areas with only three located outside state capitals in Obose, Anambra State, Okene, Kogi State, and Warri in Delta State. The tangible excuse for this is that the stations have commercial status and must be located within the reach of the markets in the urban areas.

The total numbers of applicants for broadcast licence since the deregulation of broadcasting in Nigeria nine years ago, is still a closely guarded secret, but indications are that over a thousand applications have been returned to the NBC. As at June 8 1996 the number stood at 321, comprising 64 applications for radio licenses, 59 for television, and 198 for cable satellite redistribution.

One other area of contention is that the NBC decree out rightly forbids the processing of applications seeking to establish religion or political broadcasting outfits. Section 10 (a and b) of the decree states that "the commission shall not grant a licence to religious organizations or a political party". A number of religious groups are known to have applied for radio licences, but till date, none has been granted. The only exception is that by the Zamfara state government which is presently constructing an Islamic radio. Unconfirmed media reports indicate that the NBC has granted the request. The Decree is, however, silent on other forms of community broadcasting and this has been interpreted to mean that they are equally forbidden.

The licensing process is structured in such a way that makes the NBC the sole regulatory body for the existing public and commercial stations. Licensed broadcast stations pay between N1.5million and N3million in addition to other fees.

However, experiences elsewhere around the world, particularly in the Eastern and Southern African countries, have shown that the effective regulation and control of broadcast stations, derive from a clear-cut demarcation of broadcast outlets along three major poles. These include for public, commercial or community purpose, and their roles are explicitly spelt out.

This is what is in practice in South Africa, where there are between 140 and 160 community broadcasting stations, although about 70 per cent of them deviate from the mainstream community broadcasting in some ways.

The lump up of the existing stations in Nigeria, has been a source of concern to media owners. It does not allow room for purely public service broadcasting such that can be encouraged by community broadcasting.

The large interest, which Nigerians have in the electronic media, precisely community broadcasting, has consistently been displayed at several public hearings which the NBC has held in the course of public assessment of private broadcasters. The hearings were, among others, geared towards the renewal of the licences of the stations which licences have reached five years. It is mandatory for private stations to apply for licence renewal every five years.

At each forum, Nigerians eagerly talk on the broadcast deregulation process and how bad it was for successive governments to have locked the gate against private operators before 1992.

Since the 1930s - the colonial period - to independence period in the 1960s, the official, intent of broadcasting in Nigeria was "public service" But what public service can Government-owned and private commercial stations render in view of their primary concerns.

The argument has been on in Nigeria, but there is a consensus that the deregulation process will serve the public interest better if members of the public are allowed to collectively own and control broadcast establishment.

Even the fore-runners in the private ownership of radio and television stations in Nigeria recognize this fact. Chief Raymond Dokpesi, the chairman and chief executive of Daar Communications, spoke the minds of many Nigerians in this regard when, at the PANA/NAN monthly forum in March 1996, he declared: "The bold move to deregulate broadcasting is no doubt in public interest and could only brighten the terrain professionally. The Federal
Government and the NBC deserve every commendation for the step, but care must be taken in the procedure for licensing.

"Deregulation in the broadcast industry should (therefore) not lead to failure. It should, rather, strengthen the industry and ensure wider reach to a wider audience for public good. To achieve this, deregulation should, therefore, demphasize one-man ownership. Deregulation should be all encompassing leaving the broadcast industry entirely in public hands, neither in the hands of establishment or on a one-man ownership structure. It should be by public trust to allay all fears about using the medium to promote state or individual agenda. In this manner, public interest and social good will be strengthened while the protection of intellectual works will be guaranteed and the rights of artistes to royalties will be better appreciated.

"The key to better prospects in the broadcast industry is to divest government and individual interest, transfer such interest to the public for better management and greater efficiency. This is what will guarantee public good on the long run"

But beyond this, what the current situation demands, some broadcasting analysis have said, is a broader deregulation that will include community radio and television, and a greater allocation of air time, to participatory programmes in commercial and public stations.

But the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo seemed to have foreclosed meeting the expectation of stakeholders on this issue. At a forum with a delegation of IBAN who paid him a courtesy call at Aso Rock in October, President Obasanjo, pleading a nebulous "security implications", owned up to giving the NBC the authority to halt the network operations of DAAR Communications.

President Obasanjo said at the meeting that the Federal Government had taken a "calculated risk" when it granted licenses to private broadcast stations through the broadcast sector deregulation in 1992. He said the risk paid off because the broadcasters had performed creditably. In a manner depicting double-speak, he added that the government was, however, exercising necessary caution and restraint in matters relating to granting new broadcasting licenses or wider coverage areas for existing independent broadcast stations because of the sensitive nature of broadcasting.

"So far, from what I can see and hear, your performance has been commendable, but we must not repeat the type of thing we did with banking in your case. We over-did things and the entire industry was over-whelmed", President Obasanjo told the IBAN delegation led by Chief Raymond Dokpesi.

"In the case of banks, the worst that happened was that some people lost their money, but we have to be very, very cautious with private broadcasting because in your case, the harm that could result from imprudent management of broadcasts will be much worse", Obasanjo added.

The meeting of IBAN members with President Obasanjo was initiated by the association following threats by the NBC to shut down independent broadcasting outfit who failed to pay to it 2.5 per cent of the gross income and the organisation's halting of attempts by the Lagos-based AIT and Raypower radio, pioneer private broadcasting company based in Lagos, to operate network with some other private stations and state-owned broadcast media.

Despite the obvious government lukewarm attitude to the concept and practice of community broadcasting in Nigeria, indications are that it is an idea whose time has come and which before long will be a reality.

The Community Broadcasting: How It Works

In a country of over 100 million people made up of over 250 ethnic nationalities, the gains of community broadcasting remains a major untapped wealth in Nigeria.

The community broadcasting facility is one that is owned, programmed and managed by the community it serves. It is usually a non-profit station responding to the information needs of the community. It is organized around the priorities set by the community and is entirely accountable to community structure.
The World Association Community Radio Broadcasting (AMARC) in a 1992 publication entitled: A Passion for Radio: Radio Waves and Community said the community media is, "the most widespread medium in many countries and easily accessible". Following a minimal training period, community radio restores radio vocation as an instrument of two-way communication.

Community radio goes by many names. It is called popular or educational radio in Latin America, rural or local radio in Africa. Public radio in Australia and free or associative radio in Europe. All these names describe the same phenomenon: that of gaining a voice and democratizing communication on a community scale.

The community broadcaster can be differentiated from the commercial broadcaster by their set priorities. When a conflict sets in, and they have to choose between community issues and profit, the commercial broadcaster will go for money while the community broadcaster will give the air space to community issues.

Profit is not the motive of the community broadcasters, but service to society. Service that bridges gaps in knowledge, creates consensus, strengthens and promotes democracy, and evolve a situation of shared life amongst a people.

The cost of establishing a community broadcasting station is nose-diving by the day. Earlier, the cost of procuring the cheapest set of equipment, known as the digital Edit Work Station, had been in the range of $10,000. This has began to reduce drastically with the result that it is now possible, using technology from the United states, to establish a seven mile radius broadcasting at 10 or 100 watts, for a s little as $1,000, because an antennae tower, the most costly item for a high-powered radio station, will not be required. Further more, new technology developed in India by two young inventors who have built a radio transmitter that can fit into a briefcase, has reduced the cost to about $200.

Promoters of liberal broadcasting around the world have tied community broadcasting to five strings revolving around a common objective. The stations must be accessible, affordable, accountable, acceptable and available to community residents. To this end, the community would determine and design the programme content.

In fact, attempts have equally been made by promoters of community and participatory broadcasting to specify the level of participation that any radio or television station should have in order to be qualified to be called a community or participatory station. In this wise, certain criteria have been identified. These are:

- Community involvement in the ownership, programming and control of the station
- Must be sensitive to the needs of the community.
- Must involve local residents, use their language, involve them in decision making, in the implementation of the station projects and the sharing of the benefits.
- Prevalence of talk shows and other participatory programmes to enlighten the people on their rights and duties all designed and implemented by locals.
- Must be created by law, it must be deliberate, purposeful and regulated in favour of pluralistic media situation.

In the Eastern, Southern and parts of West Africa, policies have been formulated for the operation of community broadcasting. Mali is one country in West Africa that has embraced community broadcasting. In Bamako, Mali's capital, information is free and available on the airwaves. There are about forty community radio stations in Bamako alone. Communities defined either by their interest or geographical location, own and run these stations in the language of their choice. The community radio is funded by the community it serves.

They benefit from a very liberal government credit policy set out for it, and wavers in the forms of import duties for facilities and materials.
Community Broadcasting Through The Back Door

In spite of the fact that NTA already has 32 TV Stations located all over Nigeria several of which are in various states of dilapidation, it recently embarked upon establishing more 67 new TV stations. The national radio network, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, is also setting up 37 new stations around the country. The question most stakeholders ask is; is this a round about way of achieving community broadcasting in Nigeria?

Sometime in December 2000, Mr. Ben Murray-Bruce, the Director General of the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), disclosed for the first time that the authority plans to establish 67 more stations all over the country. According to Mr. Bruce, the idea is to "enable the authority cover adequately and accurately all the important activities of the three tiers of government."

When the Director-General made the revelation, NTA had 32 stations located in 24 states of the federation. The implication was, therefore, that at the end of the exercise, NTA will have 96 stations in its network. The idea is for each state to have at least three stations, one in each Senatorial district.

The federal government reportedly gave the authority money and material worth up to N3billion. Each transformer needed for the exercise, it is understood, would cost between N50 million and N200 million. Mr. Murray-Bruce appealed to benefiting state governments to donate land, buildings and other materials for the establishment of the stations. Soon afterwards, many state governments including those of Edo, Ebonyi, Kogi, Borno, Yobe and Delta, started to announce such donations.

The Federal Government is similarly equipping the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN). FRCN also plans to establish 37 new stations to ensure effective dissemination of information on activities and programmes of the Federal Government. Mr. Eddie Iroh, FRCN Director General on March 1 signed a contract for Digital Studios with Northgate Limited on behalf of the Federal Government at the Corporation's headquarters in Abuja.

The contract is to construct six ultra-modern digital studios for FRCN stations. The studios would be constructed in Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna and the National Assembly at a cost of N359 million. It was to be executed in 180 days.

Mr. Iroh revealed that indeed five new transmitters had been installed in Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna and Abuja and are already being test-run. Mr. Iroh said the new stations would be located in all the states of the Federation, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

The question most stakeholders ask is; is this a round-about way of achieving community broadcasting in Nigeria? If this is the intention of government, clearly the attempt suffers from very fundamental errors in that it does not meet the criteria for community broadcasting.

Despite the obvious flaws, some media stakeholders and watchers see the development as a good omen as it is one step away from community broadcasting. They say the project would, to some extent, open media access to rural dwellers and bring them closer to governance as well as serve as a ready tool for social mobilization.

Meanwhile, there has been apprehension in several quarters that beyond government's taunted motive for embarking on the project, it may indeed be a massive propaganda machine in readiness for the up-coming elections.

Governors from none-PDP controlled states have been expressing this fear. They query the wisdom of the project when at the moment, many of the NTA's 32 stations are in dilapidated state with no working tool and finance, which led to a massive retrenchment of staff by the authority shortly before is decided to establish more stations. The question most people ask is: Why the government did not consider it wise to strengthen the already established stations before embarking on setting up new ones?

This fear is further accentuated by the fact that a cursory look at the state governments falling head over themselves to assist the federal government and NTA execute the project are mostly those controlled by the PDP, with a sprinkle of governors of APP who are known to
share some affinity with the federal government. Only one of the AD states has shown enthusiasm in the implementation of the project.

Despite the skepticism that some state governments and many Nigerians continue to express regarding the true intent of government for embarking on the projects, Information Minister, Professor Jerry Gana, staunchly denied that the project is in anticipation of the year 2003 elections. Speaking in April while receiving some visitors in his office, the minister said: "I want to say it loud to those state government who are doubting the real purpose of the move by government to set up 67 other NTA stations across the country not to be apprehensive".

Clearly, it seems that the minister has taken for granted one age-long adage: action speaks louder than words.

SPECIAL REPORT: Touring Into Controversy

Controversy, which heralded the National Media Tour embarked upon by Nigeria's Minister of Information, Professor Jerry Gana, has again reared its head as the tour comes to an end. This is in addition to the refusal of the Governors of South Western Nigerian states to allow the minister and his team into their states.

The tour, which began On June 25, 2001, was concluded by the end of the October. Initially scheduled to end on September 29, the tour was conceived by the Minister of Information and National Orientation, "to assess and showcase the aggregate achievements of all tiers of government in two years of democratic rule in the country".

The Minister, who noted that the media especially had unanimously declared that the government had failed to deliver the dividends of democracy, said the tour was intended to restore the credibility and integrity of democracy, promote transparency and accountability in governance; generate a healthy competition among elected governments in their response to the needs and aspirations of the electorate.

According to him, it will give the media and the people the opportunity to see for themselves what the elected governments claim to have done for the electorate, so that the government's good intentions, efforts and their constraints/limitations, could be better appreciated.

Apart from showcasing the dividends of democracy, the media tour was also to be used to launch two new social mobilisation programmes, namely Operation Produce More and a campaign to promote locally manufactured goods.

The tour which began in Edo State featured a retinue of accredited journalists from various government-owned and independent media organizations as well as staff of the information ministry. Prior to the trip, criticisms had trailed the performance of the various tiers of government in the media. The consensus was that the dividends of democracy which the government had prided itself to have delivered, were nowhere to be seen after more than two years of civil rule. Critics held that there has not been any improvement in the availability of basic infrastructures for the populace.

Given this background, numerous commentators were quick to posit that the minister was on a jamboree, as the assessment would obviously be tainted.

During the past six months, over 75 journalists have toured many of the states of the federation with the minister to "see first hand the dividends of democracy". Each participating journalist was entitled to a daily N10,000 allowance in addition to being fed and given a hotel accommodation. Unofficial sources had put the cost of executing the tour of the 36 states at about N1.7 billion.

Governors in the South-West zone controlled by the Alliance for Democracy (AD), however, kicked against any media tour of their states.

Opinions were divided over why the AD governors took the decision. But a report in Daily Times newspaper which until recently was owned by the federal government of October
15, said the South-West states objected to the journalists' inspection of their projects due to alleged indisposition to the exercise expressed by the AD leadership.

Besides, the report said at least two of the six governors were also said to be against the visit because of their sudden fear that the tour may expose their inadequacies.

The Daily Times said in the report that the AD leadership felt that by embarking on the tour, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) - led Federal Government was overreaching itself and trying to score what some of the party chieftains called "cheap political points." The party stalwarts were said to have argued that a PDP government could not rate the AD states since that would amount to "giving your opponent a weapon to fight you."

It was learnt that they also argued that since the pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group, Afenifere, the platform on which the governors stood election, had earlier carried out an assessment of the AD states, there was no need for a similar exercise by the Federal Government team.

Although some governors were said to have argued in favour of the media tour since it was wider in scope and was made up of journalists, those opposed to the exercise did not see it that way. They were said to have read political undertones to the tour despite efforts to disabuse their minds.

Since they were elders of the party who the governors did not want to offend, the state chief executives accepted to withdraw support for the tour and directed their Commissioners of Information to carry out the order.

The information minister and other government officials tried to justify the tour as a welcome development, which they argued would help the citizens appreciate how much the government has helped in improving their lives, and generally keep them abreast of the pace of governance. They also said it would provide ample opportunity to juxtapose the performances of various governments against the finances available to each state.

In a widely syndicated article, Emeka Nwosu, one of the journalists accredited to be on the tour, took a swipe at opponents of the tour and adjudged it to be "one of the best things" that have happened to Nigerian's current democracy.

Mr. Nwosu found a soul mate in Dan Amor, a journalist formerly a staff of the now defunct The Diet newspapers. In a piece similarly syndicated as Mr. Nwosu's, titled: Imperative of the Media Tour, he made a passionate case for the tour. According to him, "it is interesting to note that the import of this piece is not to preempt our judgment of the achievements of the various levels of government. But by the time our findings would be made public at the end of the exercise, even the most implacable cynic will come to terms with the fact that, for the first time in our history, Nigerian journalists have been given the opportunity to march in a group to the scene of events and challenge Nigerian politicians to wake up from slumber and forestall any attempts by the military to stage a comeback."

Writing as though it was the Minister of Information himself that was speaking, he declared: “The era of armchair criticism is gone. Against all odds, we have resolved to move forward to see for ourselves. This is our word. And our bound.”

During the tour and up till now, there was none and there has not been a single story authored by Mr. Amor stating what he saw.

Four months into the tour Mr. Nwosu in another article, similarly syndicated, concluded that the tour had been a success. But without providing concrete and specific examples of the dividends of democracy to back his claim, readers were left with the only impression that the success of the tour is predicated on the fact that it had provided the team an opportunity to see "the vastness of a country with alluring and breath taking landscapes and contrasting topographies."

But as the tour came to a close, discerning observers have concluded that it only served to expose many of the state governors who have mounted media campaigns regarding their so-called performances. It also showed the lack of sincerity on the part of the minister in his assessment criteria.
Despite this obvious failure of governance, media reports that followed showered encomium on the governor for "a job well done".

Indeed, despite the large number of journalists on the ministerial entourage, the actual reportage on their findings on the pages of the newspapers and in the electronic media has been rather scanty. The performance or lack of it in every state visited, which ought to have been brought to the attention of the Nigerian public, was neglected. Rather focus was more on claims made by the state governors without as much effort made to verify these assertions.

In fact, there were often allegations that several of the chief executives gave large parting cash gifts to the journalists on the minister's entourage which effectively ensured that the reports were generously fair to the chief executive.

In a rare show of faith in the enterprise called Nigeria, Daily Times in a an editorial comment in its September 27 edition titled: Accountability And The National Media Tour, noted that while the tour is "a pointer to the avowed openness of this administration, to let the Press, and indeed, the Nigerian public know what it is doing and where it is doing such things", the newspaper, however, said it should not be accepted and applauded, on face value, alone.

According to the newspaper: "Beyond the question of openness, it is our belief and conviction that a good market sells itself. If indeed this administration has done things that need to be commended, we feel sinking more than millions of naira into telling and showing the same Nigerians, who are supposed to be enjoying the new infrastructure, does not sit well on critical minds."

Provision of infrastructure like roads, pipe borne water, electricity and what have you, is like a pregnant woman who cannot hide her pregnancy. People would always know that she is pregnant."

The time and money being sunk into this Media Tour project no doubt would have been enough to provide a moderate rural community with either electricity or pipe borne water."

Altogether there are journalists officially on this tour. They are all being housed and cared for at the expense of the tax payer. Also in this category are the numerous aides of the Minister who have become part of the Media Tour, which some critics have decided to call "the Jerry Gana Fellowship"."

That is understandable for within the space of three months which the tour is supposed to last, one would have gone on three or more short term fellowship and have certificates to show for them." We also find unacceptable, the stamp of approval given this tour by Nigerian journalists, with the presence of the NUJ President in the group." The newspaper said it was of the view that the independence of the journalists on the team was likely to be compromised, and wondered in what capacity the NUJ President was in the tour team. It argued that if his presence in the team was on the basis of a personal recognition as a journalist and not as representative of Nigerian Journalists, he should cease to make pronouncements at every stop on the tour on behalf of Nigerian journalists.

Arguing that media houses in the country can always send out reporters to do proper assessment of the dividends of democracy around the country instead of this guided tour, where the journalists are shepherded and directed on where to go or not to go, the newspaper said that in future such tours, if at all they should be made, should be done with local correspondents who are not only on the ground but have sufficient knowledge of the activities of the government.

On its part, ThisDay newspaper in an editorial comment on October 16, titled: The National Media Tour, said the media tour was a travesty of journalism etiquette and waste of energies. According to the editorial: "It is bad enough that the government initiated the tour. Journalism practitioners need not wait to be prodded in this kind of exercise if the media are to serve as watchdog over those who govern at all levels to ensure that they positively affect the lives of the citizens. It is an obligation explicitly enshrined in the constitution for the mass media to "uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people". The citizenry look up to the media to perform this role and the survival of democracy in this clime depends on it."
This constitutional duty goes beyond inspection of physical projects. Future exercise must, therefore, proceed to examine issues of probity, transparency and accountability in government in every state of the federation."

Perhaps the most deadly blow to the media tour was the result of a survey conducted by The Guardian newspaper and published in its November 22 edition. Respondents in the survey were of the view that while the tour is in order, the presence of the media in the tour was unnecessary.

The survey, conducted in 24 states in the six geo-political zones between October 29 and November 7, 2001 asked the question: Do you Support The Media Tour embarked upon by the Minister of Information and National Orientation?

According to the poll which sampling population was 1,200, 47.7 percent (572 respondents) were in support of the media tour. Three hundred and eighty-eight respondents (32.3 per cent) opposed it; calling it a waste of resources, 240 respondents or 20 percent did not give any comment.

The zonal breakdown of the 572 respondents in support of the tour revealed that the North Central geo-political zone tops the list with 119 respondents followed by North East, 108; North West, 101; South East, 96; South West, 78 and South South, 70.

Opposition to the tour was 'loudest' in the South South geo-political zone with 88 responses which breakdown (44 percent) followed by South East 67, North East 66, North West and South West 62 each while North Central has 43.

On whether Journalists should accompany the minister or not, 44.4 percent or 533 responses are in strong opposition while 428 or 35.7 percent are in support; 238 or 19 percent are ambivalent on the issue.

**Media Rights Monitor** is published monthly by the Media Rights Agenda (MRA), an independent, non-governmental organisation established for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria. MRA is registered under Nigerian law and has Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.
LETTERS

WHAT MANNER OF NBC?

I

have followed very closely the controversy between the National Broadcast Commission (NBC) and the Independent Broadcasting Association of Nigeria (IBAN) over application of Laws and regulations especially as it affects licensing of broadcast stations and payment of 2.5 per cent of their gross revenue by IBAN members to NBC as re-echoed by your reputable journal, Media Rights Monitor in its September, 2001 edition (Vol. 6. No. 9.)

Please kindly permit me to state my observations as follows:

1. The imposition of 2.5 per cent levy on the gross revenue of IBAN members by NBC is not supported by law. It is well settled that where a statute gives an implementing authority or officer the discretion to perform an act, that power must be exercised in a reasonable manner, which in this case should have been through a transparent and democratically negotiated agreement between NBC and the stakeholders, IBAN. This will take into cognizance amongst others, the pioneer status of the broadcast stations, the need to sustain Nigeria’s nascent democracy as the harsh economic environment under which they are operating.
2. It appears to me from his arm twisting tactics (refusal to allocate new frequencies to existing broadcast stations until they pay the levy), whimsical maneuvers (telling one station that others have paid the levy when this is not true), threats and arbitrary impositions that Mallam Danladi Bako is not a fit and proper person to head such a sensitive position as helmsman at NBC. Pray, what are Mr. Bako's credentials for heading the NBC? Is it his stint with Nigerian Television Authority and the sports ministry?

Yours faithfully,

AHAM NJOKU (ESQ)
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We Are Grateful To You

I write on behalf of correspondents of various newspapers in Warri. I want to say that we are grateful for the copies of Media Rights Monitor that you send to us regularly.

We must say that the journal has been helpful to us and will be grateful if you could continue to send copies to us.

Thank you very much.

Segun James
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Warri, Delta State

Keep It Up

I want to use this medium to say well done for the job you are doing. Your journal, Media Rights Monitor, has in no small way assisted many people to know what their fundamental human rights are and the evils committed by our Government against citizens. Keep it up.

Yours faithfully,

Cyprian Iwuji
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Put Me On Your Mailing List

I recently came across your journal, Media Rights Monitor, and it made a huge impression on me. I would like to subscribe to the journal.

I would be very grateful if my request is considered.

Thank you

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...And Me Too

Thanks for the good job you are doing for the country. Only God, perhaps, knows the best reward for you.
I used to be on your mailing list while writing for The Source magazine. But since May 2001 when I moved to Champion newspapers, I have missed your informative journal, Media Rights Monitor.

I, therefore, write to request you to put my name on your mailing list. That will surely restore my link with what is happening in "our" world.

Thanks in anticipation whilst I wish you the best.

Achilleus Uchegbu
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156/158 Oshodi-Apapa E-way,
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MEDIA MONITORING: Tempo of News Gathering Rises - MRA

The tempo of newsgathering and news dissemination by Nigerian media rose significantly between August 1 and 31, according to two reports recently released by Media Rights Agenda (MRA). The reports, which were published in September, are products of MRA's Media Monitoring Project. The reports, however, noted that there were only marginal differences between the cumulative news reports and those which were evaluated.

The print media report which was tagged: Print Monitor noted that the number of monitored news reports increased from 15,217 in the previous month to 16,610. Similarly, the reports, which fell under the project's topic/variables climbed from 1,851 to 2,264. However, the percentage ratio of evaluated items to total reports, which was 12.2% in August, remained stable at 12% in September.

Said the Print Monitor: "The implication of this is that while there was appreciable increase in the tempo of newsgathering and publishing, the ratio of reports relevant to this monitoring project has remained stable."

In a general assessment of the print media's performance in August, the report observed that the 15 publications which were reviewed did not pay enough attention to important issues of public interest, considering the low proportion (12%) of news reports which were relevant to the project's four main topic/variables.

It will be recalled that the four issues including Democracy Issues, Political Issues, Human Rights and Public Accountability, were deliberately chosen to encompass critical issues of public interest. Bearing this in mind, the report argued that there was considerable room for improvement in the media's day-to-day coverage of these important matters. The findings also constituted a question mark on the general performance of the print media.

As for the evaluated categories, 1,120 items were recorded for the Democracy variable alone. If the figure for Political Issues variable (737) is added to it, politically related news items will be 1,857. However, the figures for Human Rights and Public Accountability variables were far less impressive, in fact, they were worrisome.

The 15 publications evaluated in the project published a total of 190 human rights-related items in the month. For public accountability, there were 205. It was clear that the editors did not regard human rights and public accountability matters as being important enough to require much editorial space.

The report noted that: "Without a doubt, the print media provided a useful platform (in the month) on which the educated citizenry engaged in robust, even heated debate on
The print media report advised newspaper owners and managers not to set aside legitimate journalistic preoccupations because of revenue from advertisement.

Pertaining to the broadcast media, virtually all radio stations gave the various governments massive and positive publicity to the extent that the stations had become official mouthpieces. Unfortunately, issues of public accountability and human rights were grossly under-reported.

The political issues variable received the most attention with 1,531 reports compared with 1,072 for democracy; 174 for human rights and 195 for public accountability. Most reports were derived from the Federal Capital Territory, followed by Rivers and Lagos states, in that order.

The use of sound-bites and actualities declined sharply on all the stations including Channels Television and NTA 2 Channel 5 which used to employ them to a significant extent. Poor reception, bad pictures and various technical faults were constantly experienced during the month. Also, viewers continued to be confused by the infusion of normally commercial material into news broadcasts.

On the whole, six radio stations and six television stations spread throughout the country were monitored. Overall, 10,084 reports were monitored, divided into 6,440 (radio) and 3,644 (television). The Airwaves Monitor conclusively advised the station managers to procure the necessary equipment, which would ensure smooth transmission of signals. It also urged increased use of sound bites and actualities.

**EXECUTIVE WATCH: Nigerians Call For A Probe Of Payment For Railway Contract**

The recent payment of the sum of $52.69 million (N58.69 billion) by President Obasanjo to a Chinese construction company, which handled the contract to revive the railway, has come under severe condemnation from Nigerians. According to them, the payment, which was facilitated by the Transport Minister, Ojo Maduekwe, despite alleged shortcomings in the execution of the contract, was devoid of transparency and not in tandem with the anti-corruption crusade of the President. The condemnation came against the backdrop of reports that there was no certification through a competent consultant that the job had been completed.

Nigerians, therefore, called for a probe into the contract and payment, saying where fraud may have been perpetrated, the monies should be retrieved and those involved prosecuted.

These views were the outcome of a survey carried out by Media Rights Agenda under its Executive Watch project.

Following the virtual collapse of the Nigerian railway corporation successive government have made efforts to revive rail transportation, all of which have failed to yield any fruit. For instance the General Babangida regime committed over N2 billion to the corporation. General Sani Abacha, in a move to revive the moribund railway, entered into a N45 billion contract in 1995 with the Chinese Civil Engineering and Construction Company. The contract was to repair the rail tracks, reduce gradients, eliminate sharp corners, refurbish and procure additional coaches, and to supply 50 Locomotive engines. Before the end of the regime, no success was recorded.

President Obasanjo recently paid the sum of $52.69 million (N58.69 billion) to the Chinese construction company, which was facilitated by the Transport Minister, Chief Ojo Maduekwe. The payment was made allegedly without a certification through a competent
consultant that the job has been done. The Chinese company claimed to have achieved a 95 per cent job completion, a claim which is not validated by evidence on the grounds.

In fact, the Transport Minister told the Senate Transport Committee, on inquiry, that out of the 50 locomotives supplied by the Chinese company, only 10 were working. He further explained that "this was largely due to lack of spare parts, which did not accompany the locomotives when they were supplied". When the Senate committee probed him further, he reportedly said that since the contract had received presidential blessing, he was not obliged to answer further questions.

Some Nigerians, besides the Senate transport committee, have criticized the minister and President Obasanjo. They said that the payment, given the alleged shoddy job, was devoid of transparency and not in tandem with the anti-corruption crusade of the President. But other people have also argued that the President could not have done otherwise because a previous government entered into the contract and the present government was obliged to accept the liability.

The survey, therefore, aimed to seek the views of Nigerians on the two dominant positions in the corridors of power and among some outspoken Nigerians.

Specifically, out of the 7,284 respondents polled in the survey, 5,582 (76.6%) said they did not support the Federal Government's payment to the Chinese Construction Company while 1,648 (22.6%) supported the payment, despite allegations of sharp practices in the execution of the contract.

On a City- by-City basis, the survey indicates that majority of respondents in all the cities polled did not support the Federal Government's payment to the Chinese company.

For instance, in Abuja, 553 (55.9%) respondents did not support the payment, while 437 (44.1%) did; In Benin, 890 (96.7%) did not support, while 25 (2.7%) supported the payment; Enugu, 940 (94%) did not support, 60 (6%) supported; Ibadan, 517 (62.1) did not support, 293 (32.1%) supported; Kano, 597 (66.5%) did not support, 252 (28%) supported, 49 others were undecided; in Lagos, 469 (63.9%) did not support, while 265 (36.1%) supported; in Port Harcourt, all the 995 respondents polled did not support.

On the question whether respondents support the argument that the Federal Government had to pay the Chinese construction company given that the government was subject to accepting the liability, 2,334 (32.1%) respondents said 'Yes', while 4,639 (32.1%) respondents said 'No'.

Broken down on a City-by-City analysis, the response pattern showed that majority of respondents from Ibadan precisely, 528 (63.4%) respondents supported the government on this particular issue, while 305 (36.6%) respondents did not support the government, unlike the response pattern of respondents from other cities.

Other cities's responses are as follows; Abuja, 378 (38.2%) supported, while 612 (61.8%) did not support; Benin, 305 (33.2%) supported, while 428 (46.5%) did not support; Enugu, 199 (19.9%) supported, 801 (80.1%) did not support; Kaduna, 206 (22.5%) supported, 584 (63.9%) did not; Kano, 389 (43.3%) supported, 509 (56.7%) did not; Lagos, 306 (41.7%) supported, 428 (58.3) did not; Port Harcourt 23 (2.3%) supported, 972 (97.7%) did not support.

Responding to the question whether respondents support the view that the government should have revoked the contract 3,533 (76.2%) respondents said 'Yes' while 1,050 (22.6%) respondents said 'No'. Fifty-six respondents (1.2%), however, were undecided.

On a City-by-City analysis, except in Kaduna, where majority of respondents, specifically 377(64.5%), said the contract did not need to have been revoked, 151 (25.9) others were of the view that the contract should have been revoked. Fifty-six were, however, undecided.

The response pattern from other cities indicate majority of respondents preferred that the contract should have been revoked. For instance in Abuja, 502 (82%) respondents said the contract should have been revoked, while 110 (18%) respondents opposed the idea. In Benin, 367 (85.7%) preferred the contract revoked, 61 (14.3%) thought otherwise; Enugu, 588 (73.4%) preferred it revoked, 213 (26.6%) did not; Ibadan, 200 (65.6%) for, 105(34.4%) against; Kano,
427 (83.9%) for, 82 (16.1%) against; Lagos, 326 (76.2%) for, 102 (23.8%) against; Port Harcourt, 972 respondents, being the total polled, support revocation.

Lastly, asked whether respondents support the view that the contract and payment be probed and where fraud may have been perpetrated, the monies are retrieved and those involved prosecuted, 6,194 (85%) representing the majority said 'Yes', while 1,090 (15%) respondents said 'No'.

On a City-by-City response, the pattern showed that in all the cities polled, majority of the respondents were of the view that the contract and payment should be probed and where fraud may have been perpetrated, the monies be retrieved and those involved prosecuted. For instance, in Abuja, 673 (68%) respondents share this view, while 317 (32%) other respondents said 'No'. In Benin, 899 (97.6%) respondents were for probe, 22 (2.4%) were against; Enugu, 966 (96.6%) supported the call for a probe, 34 (3.4%) against; Ibadan, 604 (72.5%) for, 229 (27.5%) against; Kaduna, 753 (82.4%) for, 161 (17.6%) against; Kano, 745 (83%) for, 153 (17%) against; Lagos 560 (76.3%) for, 174 (23.7%) against; and in Port Harcourt, the total 972 respondents polled, supported a probe.

**How The Survey Was Conducted**

For the survey, eight thousand questionnaires were produced and administered. Out of these, 7,284 were returned, representing 91 per cent.

One thousand questionnaires were administered in each of the eight cities covered in this exercise. These include Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Lagos, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Others cities are Benin, Enugu and Port Harcourt.

The survey was conducted between October 7 and 25, 2001. The questionnaires for the survey contained four structured questions, all of which were close-ended, requiring respondents to indicate either 'Yes' or 'No'.

The questionnaires were distributed among Nigerians of 18 years and above, both male and female. It also deliberately attempted to capture, in significant ratio, people of three broad educational background, i.e. No formal education to primary school education; post-primary education and post-secondary education.

Respondents who do not possess sufficient literacy ability were assisted by MRA's researchers to read and interpret the questions and elect appropriate options according to the preferences of the respondents concerned.

The exercise showed that 4,104 out of the total respondents numbering 7,284, representing 56.3 per cent, are male and the remaining 3,180 respondents, representing 43.7 per cent, are female. It also showed that 3,080 of the respondents are single, 3,751 married, 318 widowed, and 135 divorced.

The survey also showed that 2,936 of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 30 years, 3,117 are in the range of 31 to 50 years old and 979 are between the bracket of 51 to 60 years old. Two hundred and fifty-two respondents are over 60 years old.

The occupation of the respondents ranges from civil servants, professionals, artisans, traders, housewives, unemployed persons and faith ministers.

**Advert Agencies, Media Organizations Lock Horns**

A major rumpus looks set to occur in the already hyper-active broadcast media sector following threats issued recently by the general Assembly of the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) on the advertising sector. BON at its recent general assembly issued the advertising section a 30 day ultimatum to either pay up all outstanding debts owed its members or get black-listed by BON member-stations.

BON took the decision at its 30th General Assembly held at the Women Development Centre, Yola, Adamawa State.
The meeting dwelt on the need for dialogue and co-operation between BON and Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria (AAPN), improved business practices, settlement of debts, and the 8th All African Games to be hosted by Nigeria in 2003.

According to BON, several attempts made by member-stations to persuade agencies and advertisers to settle their debts proved abortive, which made the Broadcasting organisation to now enjoin member stations to seize the initiative by playing a leading role in decisions that affect the fortunes of media owners.

The meeting also agreed that besides 30 day ultimatum to pay all outstanding debts, all advertising agencies making placements should make a minimum of 50% pre-payment while the balance due should be paid within 45 days.

Any default in payment after 45 days will attract a 5% monthly surcharge. Where the default in payment exceed 90 days, both the product, Advertiser/Agency shall be blacklisted by member-stations of BON and the public shall be duly informed, the meeting stressed.

However, the meeting resolved that "member-stations that flout the stipulated decision shall be liable to a fine of N100,000 per contravention just as the names of such member-stations shall be published in major media channels."

In a related development, the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), has sounded a caveat that it would join issues with the advertising agencies if they failed to honour their financial obligations to its members. The threat was issued by Mr. Ray Ekpu, Executive Secretary of NPAN and chief executive of Newswatch magazine.

Mr. Ekpu in an interview accused the advertisers of engaging in activities that threaten the existence of the print media. Mr. Ray Ekpu, pointed an accusing finger at the advertising agencies, alleging a deliberate under-deal by advert agencies against Nigerian media. He claimed in the interview that advertising agencies often neglect, and in most cases fail, to settle their accounts with media organizations.

According to him, one of the way in which the advertisers fleece publishers is by forcing on NPAN a 45-day credit on adverts that are published unlike what is obtainable in other parts of the world.

Secondly, Mr. Epku said advert agencies resist attempts by publishers to increase their rates once in a year in line with what obtains in other parts of the world and resists the 30 days notice.

Mr. Ekpu disclosed that NPAN has reached an irrevocable decision not to allow AAPN to dictate to media owners when they can change their advert rates, what is the rate of increase that they want to make and the notice must not exceed 30 days.

He disclosed that the AAPN recently wrote The Punch, rejecting its notice of advert rates increase after a one-month notice which is what NPAN prescribed. The AAPN, he said, insisted that The Punch’s notice should have been brought to it (AAPN) where it could have considered the request for approval.

Mr. Ekpu alleged that the AAPN members owe media owners millions of naira every year, and they have failed to address the issue satisfactorily.

According to him many advertising agencies use all kinds of gimmicks to avoid paying for their insertions. He claimed that he knows “a number of media owners who have lost money over the years and the advertising agents will be saying the advertiser has not paid, when in many cases, we found out later that the advertisers had actually paid. In some cases, they will say that they cannot find the invoice”. He asked rhetorically: “Why can't you find the invoice?” and added: “Sometimes they tell you that those people working on the computer cannot fix it and you have to come back in about two months and such nonsense."

We are not willing to accept all these excuses anymore. Sometimes, they delay and when you go back to them, they say: Oh! it is late and the advertisers would not say like to pay because it is late. Who made it to be late? So it is late and we can't be paid? Fortunately, it is done in print, and the dates can easily be confirmed. They will be owing money and will be
finding excuses not to pay, and we are sick and tired of these excuses. These people must learn to do business properly."

Continuing, Mr. Ekpu said: "If they cannot pay us from the advertisers or their own accounts, then things cannot work; except if they are suggesting that we should go to the advertisers and collect our money. In fact, if they keep dribbling us we have decided that we will write to the advertiser that they should pay us our money; that certain advertising agency said you have not paid them. So the first thing is that we deal with the debt issue and then, things will begin to take shape.

I Support NBC's Halt Of AIT Network - Obasanjo

Leading “security implications” President Olusegun Obasanjo has owned up to giving the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) the authority to halt the network operations of DAAR Communications Nigeria Limited, the owners of the Africa Independent Television (AIT) and Raypower. He made the declaration at a meeting with a delegation of the Independent Broadcasters Association of Nigeria (IBAN), who paid him a courtesy call on Aso Rock.

President Obasanjo said at the meeting that the Federal Government had taken a "calculated risk" when it granted licenses to private broadcast stations through the broadcast sector deregulation in 1992. He said the risk paid off because the broadcasters had performed creditably, but added that the government was, however, exercising necessary caution and restraint in matters relating to granting new broadcasting licenses or wider coverage areas for existing independent broadcast stations because of the sensitive nature of broadcasting.

"So far, from what I can see and hear, your performance has been commendable, but we must not repeat the type of thing we did with banking in your case. We over-did things and the entire industry was over-whelmed", President told the IBAN delegation led by Chief Raymond Dokpesi.

"In the case of banks, the worst that happened was that some people lost their money, but we have to be very, very cautious with private broadcasting because in your case, the harm that could result from imprudent management of broadcasts will be much worse", Obasanjo added.

The meeting of IBAN members with President Obasanjo was initiated by the association following threats by the NBC to shut down independent broadcasting outfit who failed to pay to it 2.5 per cent of the gross income and the organisation's halting of attempts by the Lagos-based AIT and Raypower radio pioneer private broadcasting company based in Lagos, to operate network programmes with some other private stations and state-owed broadcast media.

According to a report in The Punch newspaper of October 8, impeccable sources at the Ministry of Information and National Orientation, President Obasanjo endorsed the disqualification of the radio and television networks of DAAR Communications, having being convinced of the arguments canvassed by the Ministry of Information and National Orientation and the NBC.

The report said that the Minister of Information and National Orientation Agency, Prof. Jerry Gana, had sent a memo to the President, based on the advice of the management of NBC on the intrinsic implications of allowing private operators to control public opinion through the management of the airwaves.

In the memo sent to the President, the newspaper said that the Minister had cited instances in the past when the private operators caused tension in the country through misguided broadcast. The memo allegedly informed President Obasanjo of a report allegedly aired by a private broadcast station indicating that there was a shoot-out at the Presidential Villa some time last year, whereas it was a fracas in the outskirts of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) that was misrepresented by a reporter.
The memo also allegedly informed the President of a report by another private operator in 1999, during which it was alleged that the winner of a presidential election had been killed. The report was said to have caused untold panic and apprehension in Lagos.

In the memo to Obasanjo, the minister reportedly noted that DAAR Communications secured licences for some of its operations during the military era without meeting the necessary procedures for such licences. The memo alleged that the then Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) forced the NBC to issue licences for the network and global satellite broadcast to the management of DAAR Communications.

But a Federal High Court sitting in Abuja in September restrained the NBC and the Minister of Information and National Orientation from interfering with the broadcast of AIT, Raypower and other independent broadcast stations (see Media Right Monitor Vol. 6. No. 10 of October 2001).

Meanwhile, in what is clearly a chain of misfortune, AIT and Raypower lost their Abuja studio to fire on October 14. It was less than six months after it came back on air following its forceful closure by a consortium of banks that lent it money to expand which it could not pay. The fire, which started about 9.30 p.m. on the 12th floor at Labour House in the Central Area of Abuja metropolis, on that Sunday, raged till about 5.00 a.m. on Monday, and destroyed all the equipment in the station.

Witnesses, among them staff and the lift operator on night duty, said they began to smell smoke at about 9.30 p.m. On opening the door to the studio, there was a heavy smoke, which forced every person in the office to flee in search of help.

A staff of the AIT used her mobile phone to call fire fighters, but before help could come, the huge flame had already engulfed the studio. Even the fire service could not achieve much because they could not gain access into the premises, due to the narrowness of the gate.

A combined team of fire fighters from Julius Berger, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and State House later came to put out the fire.

Almost in tears, Chairman of Daar Communications, Dr. Raymond Dokpesi, expressed shock at the development when he visited the burnt studio.

Prior to this latest misfortune, DCL had been in the news over NBC's stoppage of its plans to operate network with some private and state-owned radio and television stations.

ROUNDTABLE: Media Carpeted For Fall In Coverage Of Rights Violations

Mixed reactions have been expressed over the pattern, scope and enthusiasm of the media's report of human rights issues since the enthronement of the present democratic government. While some analysts said the media have lost zeal and focus, others said the media is simply having a nap and would wake up to take arms when the occasion demands. Yet some others said the change in governance from dictatorship to democracy has altered the pattern, nature and scope of rights abuse that most journalists find it difficult to interconnect and report.

These conflicting assessments were given by human rights advocates, print and electronic media practitioners and other stakeholders who converged at Excellence Hotel at Ogba in Lagos recently, to assess media responsiveness to rights issues under the present dispensation.

Among participants were senior journalists such as Dr. Onukaba Adinoyi-Ojo, Managing Director, Daily Times of Nigeria Plc; Mrs Remi Oyo, President, Nigerian Guild of Editor (NGE), President Olusegun Obasanjo's Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Mr. Tunji Oseni, and Executive Secretary, Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Charles Odenigbo.
Despite conflicting assessment of the media performance, participants were that the media remains a compass to guide the country during moments of crises.

In a lead paper titled: Media Response to Right Issues Under Civil Rule: Perspective of the Practitioners, Kehinde Bamigbetan, former political Editor of The Punch, catalogued series of efforts by stakeholders to provide capacity for the media workers to respond adequately to the new challenges. He explained: "As the Fourth Estate of the realm, the media need to understand how the system functions to disseminate information and impart ideas. Media Organisations which bore the brunt of closures under military junta need to plan how to stabilise and the people, tired by the series of military dictatorship, plead for a cease-fire.

Bamigbetan stated that the media has not abandoned its role, but "it has slowed down" and whenever significant media interests are threatened, he submitted, "the media re-enacts its radical role."

He cited the treatment of ThisDay publisher, Nduka Obaigbena by the security agents and the strikes of The Guardian workers to support the assertion.

According to Bamigbetan, media coverage of rights issues depends on the value placed on human rights in a particular socio-political environment, while reiterating that "the challenges of playing its assigned role in building and monitoring the fragile democratic structures tend to reduce media sensitivity to wrongs prevalent under military rule."

But Bamigbetan's assertion that the media has merely slowed down proved a thorny conclusion. Mr. Odenigbo demanded to know why they would slow down, a move which he said can only be at the instance of forces outside the control of the media.

Jiti Ogunye, a lawyer and former Secretary General of the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, provided the perspectives of the human rights community to the media response to rights issues under the Obasanjo administration. He said the media has significantly reduced its focus on human rights issues in Nigeria and lampooned it for what he called misplaced priorities. He cited the reports of the recent riots in Jos in Plateau state and the September 11 terrorist attacks on the US, and said the media relegated the Jos incident to the background in favor of the US attack. He urged the media to focus more on the review of the constitution as well as the economic policies of the government, which health will determine the fate of Nigerian in the near future.

In a lead discussion paper, Osaro Odemwingie, Publications Officer at Media Rights Agenda, agreed with Mr. Ogunye that there has been a huge decline in media reports of human rights issues. Citing the result of an on-going media monitoring exercise by MRA, Mr. Odemwingie, said during the month of June, statistics showed that there were 1,149 reports on democracy; 826 recorded on political issues; 163 on public accountability; and 161 on human rights, in the print media. In the broadcast media during the same month there were 593 news reports on Democracy with total time allocation of 999 minutes, 28 secs (16hours, 7mins 28secs); 581 news items monitored on Political Issues with time allocation of 706 minutes, 54secs (11hours, 8mins 54secs); 116 news reports Human Rights with a time allocation of 169 minutes, 13secs (2hours, 9mins 13secs); and 104 news reports under Public Accountability with a time allocation of 118mins, 8secs (approximately 2hours). The same pattern was reported for July and August.

While not holding brief for journalists, Mr. Odemwingie, however, adduced some reasons for the media poor report of rights issues. According to him, one of the reasons is that most rights groups lack the knowledge on how to present human rights reports that would be useful to a journalist. Most journalists who reports rights issues are, therefore, faced with the problem of securing sufficient and adequately factual information on rights violations from rights groups.

Another reason according to him, is a fall out of the crisis of confidence which the human rights community suffered because of the ambivalent positions it took during such crisis as Alhaji Salisu Buhari's falsification of certificate and age declaration, Senator Evan Enwerem's
criminal record scandal and Governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu's certificate scandal. Most journalists simply regard rights advocates as opportunists out to use the media for their selfish needs.

Again, Mr. Odemwingie said the enthusiasm with which human rights issues were treated during the military era has ebbed with the attainment of democracy. Politics and politicians become the new nectar for journalists who must sell their papers, which, in this clime, is almost always centered on controversies.

Mr. Oseni, President Obasanjo's image-maker, admonished practitioners to uphold the tenets of the profession. He urged journalists to always cross-check their information before publishing. He spoke on the commitment of his boss to the efficient performance of the media as reflected in the grant of N10 million to the Nigerian Institute of Journalism.

He also emphasised the need to strengthen Colleges, Polytechnics where Mass Communication is being taught as well as supporting initiatives aimed at promoting excellence in the media.

Mrs. Oyo in her comments castigated the activities of beats associations which she stressed encourages corruption in the media and does the profession no good.

According to Lanre Arogundade, IPC coordinator, beyond rights' violations, the media is also expected to be at the vanguard of the campaign for desired constitutional and political reforms that will ensure the guarantee and protection of the rights of the citizens.

Arogundade said that if the media is to continue to enjoy the support of the larger society in its quest to continue to serve as its watchdog, it cannot afford to be indifferent to issues that affect the rights of the people.

**MANAGEMENT’S NOTICE**

Dear Readers,

Nigeria's traditionally vibrant press has come under massive attack in recent years, especially since 1993, resulting in frequent arrest and detention of journalists, confiscation of publications, closure of media facilities, banning of publications, assault on journalists, promulgation of repressive press decrees, as well as other forms of censorship.

Despite these constant attacks on the press, there was no regular medium for monitoring and documenting abuses of press freedom and freedom of expression and, therefore, drawing local and international attention to them. The result was that many violations went unnoticed and unreported. Besides, many journalists also remained largely ignorant about basic issues affecting their journalism practice or their rights and privileges.

In addition, many journalists had no idea how press laws in Nigeria as well as administrative practices relating to the media comply with constitutional provisions and international standards of free expression. Also, many journalists had no knowledge of the numerous opportunities that are available internationally for self-improvement.

Nigeria's poor communications infrastructure ensured that very little information was available outside the country on a regular basis about the situation of the media. This often enabled the military government to claim at local and international fora, despite the contradictory reality, of having the freest press in Africa and one of the freest in the world.

It was to correct this anomalous situation that Media Rights Agenda in April 1995 began to publish Media Rights Monitor.

From a modest few copies of about 200, MRA now publishes 3,000 copies of the Media Rights Monitor newsletter every month.

The publications are distributed primarily to journalists in Nigeria, who are the main target. The object of this was to be able to reach them directly and influence their attitudes about human rights, especially with regard to press freedom and freedom of expression.

Copies are also distributed to other human rights organisations in Nigeria, diplomatic missions, press associations within and outside Nigeria, international human rights non-
governmental organisations and government departments and agencies whose functions and activities affect the media.

At the risk of being immodest, we would say we have achieved modest success with the journal. And we have done this with the support of several donor groups who themselves depend on the goodwill of other groups and persons. We remain eternally grateful to them.

However, since the last couple of months, it has become increasingly difficult to get resources to continue the publication of the journal.

Believing that the journal remains relevant in the quest for a viable media industry and the promotion and protection of freedom of expression in Nigeria, and in order to continue to meet our obligation to publish the journal, we have, therefore, decided to charge a minimum subscription fee beginning from the issue of January 2002. This will just be enough to cover the cost of production and postage.

The subscription rates and other necessary information shall subsequently be communicated to you on these pages.

**Togolese Authorities Releases Jailed Journalist, Takes Two Others Into Custody**

Prominent Togolese journalist Lucien Messan has been re-released from jail following a presidential pardon granted him by President Gnassingbe Eyadema. Messan, the editorial director of Le Combat du Peuple and an outspoken critic of President Gnassingbe' Eyadema's government, was originally sentenced in June 5 to 18 months in prison. His release on October 28 comes after serving five months of the sentence. He was arrested on May 23 and detained at the civil prison in Lomé.

He was accused of "falsehood and the use of falsehood" by a government minister and charged with having added his signature to a press release issued by the Togolese Private Press Publishers Association (ATEPP). The press release had criticized statements made by the prime minister regarding extra-judicial executions in Togo in June 1998. The jailing of Messan was seen as part of a clamp-down on the freedom of the independent press in Togo.

In a telephone conversation with Reporters sans Frontiers (RSF) after his release, Messan stated that the time he spent in prison "had not changed anything" and that he would be going back to work. He also denounced the conditions under which he was detained, saying: "We were 1,200 prisoners in a 60 square metre courtyard. If you don't have any money, you die. It was horrible. I didn't receive any visitors for over one month."

Although Messan's release is good development, but attacks on the media and freedom of expression in Togo remain rampant. In what seem a game of musical chairs, the authorities on October 29, arrested two other journalists. They are Abdoul-Ganiou Bawa and Rigobert Bassadou, publication director and editor-in-chief, respectively, of the private weekly Echos d'Afrique. The journalists were jailed at the civil prison in Lomé. They are accused of "undermining honour" and "publishing false news." On September 26, the newspaper published an article titled: Fraud in Dankpen: The Chief of Police Embezzles 1,130,000 CFA Francs.

According to Echos d'Afrique, the police chief from Dankpen town reportedly received bribes from the sale of teak wood intended for the restoration of a bridge. The weekly asked the anti-corruption commission to investigate the affair.

Earlier on October 13, authorities took into detention Alphonse Nevamé Klu, the publication director of Nouvel Echo, for publishing an article that wrongly accused a government official of hiding billions of CFA Francs in his home. He remains in detention on charges of "distribution of false news".
Despite publishing an official retraction in the media and admitting that the journalist who wrote the article did not conduct a proper fact check, Klu was kept in prison. On October 26 he was transferred to the civil prison in Lomé.

In another incident, the editorial office staff of the private weekly Motion d'information has expressed concern over telephone calls they have been receiving from individuals identifying themselves as agents from the Ministry of the Interior or the intelligence services. The callers have asked the weekly's publication director to go to the ministry's offices. "Something is being prepared against our newspaper," the newspaper director, Folivi Ayika said in a letter to RSF.

According to Freedom House's 2001 Press Freedom Survey, Togo's press is still considered "not free." A new press law adopted in January gives the government the power to sentence journalists to prison terms "with no parole, fines, and the destruction of copies of publications for insulting the head of state and other violations." In August, the government introduced another law requiring all journalists to have journalism degrees. In Togo, there are no journalism programs that offer degrees.

Private Broadcast Media Face Persecution In The Gambia

Abucar Gaye, the owner of private radio station Citizen FM was arrested by the Gambian authorities and his radio station was ordered shut in what is widely believed to be the result of its independent stance on national issues. Mr. Gaye was the second private radio station owner to be arrested in less than a week.

George Christensen, owner of the private radio station Radio 1, was arrested on October 23 and taken to the National Intelligence Agency (NIA's) offices. He was released after being interrogated about the radio station's financial situation.

According to reports, Citizen FM interrupted its programming on the morning of October 29, 2001, to announce the arrest of the station's owner, Gaye, by NIA men. At first, the authorities did not offer explanation for the arrest. But when it did, it alleged that Gaye was arrested for unpaid tax arrears. According to the authorities, he apparently owes tax arrears of US$ 9,000.

However, it appeared that the arrest is linked to the radio station's announcement of its intention to broadcast results from the October 18 presidential election as the votes come in. According to Gambian law, the electoral commission must be the first body to announce the election results to the public.

Citizen FM was suspended for close to two years, between August 1998 and July 2000, for "broadcasting false news." At the time, several local journalists stated that the real motive behind the station's closure was its broadcast of a daily press review. In an effort to reach illiterate people in the country's interior, the station translated articles from English-language newspapers into local languages.

ATTACKS ON THE PRESS IN OCTOBER 2001

Vendors Prevent Sales Of Newspapers

Some members of the Abuja Newspapers Vendors Association, on October 4 in Abuja, went on rampage and prevented all national dailies brought to the Federal Capital Territory from being circulated.

The vendors had arrived the Area I distribution centre for the national dailies as early as 9.30 am. reportedly in protest against the policy of newspaper houses which aimed at discouraging them from returning unsold newspapers to them.
The protest by the vendors was allegedly directed against the management of The Punch and ThisDay newspapers for their consistent refusal to accept copies of unsold newspapers from them.

The vendors' protest, however, paralysed newspaper distribution throughout the day in Abuja. Some vendors who did not join in the protest were violently prevented from gaining access to bundles of different newspapers flown into the Federal Capital Territory from Lagos thus causing the newspaper to be returned unsold.

Some of the newspaper circulation officers who attempted to help the situation were reportedly beaten-up by the vendors who even smashed cars belonging to their colleagues.

Following indications that the vendors would resume their protest the following day, others who opposed the strike action of their colleagues, had to resolve to shift their own distribution centre from Area I to a different location to forestall a repeat occurrence of the incident.

**Sketch Workers Queried Over Complaint To Yoruba Leader**

The management of Sketch Press Limited, publishers of Daily Sketch in October queried journalists and other workers of the media organization for reporting the plight of the ailing company to the leader of the pan-Yoruba group, Afenifere, Senator Abraham Adesanya.

In the letter of reprimand served on the Chairman of the Sketch chapel of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), MR. Kunle Olatunji, the Sketch management also queried the media workers for talking to the press over the company.

The workers, however, protested the query after the workers’ congress had discussed the issue and asked the management to stop pretending that all was well with the company.

The letter of protest was signed by the acting Secretary of the NUJ, Mr. Taiwo Amodu and the Secretary of the National Union of Printing and Publishing Workers (NUPPRON), Mr. Akinwumi Akinwumi.

The workers were compelled to send a four-man delegation to Pa Adesanya to help prevail on the governors of the owner-states to bail out the company after having endured 14 months of unpaid salaries.

But the management was obviously unhappy that the plight of the company was taken to Senator Adesanya.

In a follow-up letter of reprimand, signed by the company Secretary, Mr. S.O. Akeredolu, the management claimed: "All policy statements in respect of this establishment may emanate only from the office of its Chief Executive Officer."

**Suspected Government Agents Threaten Journalist's Life**

The Enugu State correspondent of Daily Times newspaper, Acho Ugochukwu, in late October raised alarm over threats on his life by people suspected to be agents of the state government.

Speaking to journalists on October 27, the correspondent who had to relocate temporarily to Lagos, claimed that his ordeal began after the publication of a story written by him which appeared the Sunday Times of October, 14, 2001.

According to him, since the publication of the story titled: Nnamani and the looming storm, strange characters whom he suspected to be government agents have been harassing him and threatening that he would leave the state in a coffin if he did not quit voluntarily.

"They have asked me to go back to my state of origin, Abia, and write about the governor, and not to come to Enugu to ‘cause trouble’ for governor Chimaroke Nnamani," he revealed.

Ugochukwu added that his tormentors warned him that if he did not leave Enugu State before the end of October 2001 he would be staying at his own risk.

Expressing fear over his life, the reporter said he had already alerted the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) about the development.
He claimed that the organisation immediately waded into the matter by taking up the issue with the governor's Special Assistant on Media Matters, Igbonekwu Ogazimorah who reportedly said the state government would not resort to threats, violence or intimidation as a means of settling scores.

The journalist expressed lack of confidence in Mr. Ogazimorh's assurances, and insisted that his life was in danger. He then noted: "I wish to state again that whatever happens to me, the Enugu State government, and Governor Chimaroke Nnamani should be held responsible".

Protesting Youths Set Fire To Newspaper Offices

Youths in Kano city of northern Nigeria protesting the United States of America-led bombing of Afghanistan made a born-fire of the offices of some newspapers and magazines. The media titles include Vanguard, ThisDay, Post Express, National Interest, Tell, TheNews.

The youths chanting pro-Islamic and anti-American slogan claimed that the media had not been reporting the bombing objectively.

Journalist Queried Over Governor's Error

Bauchi State Governor Ahmadu Muazu in October directed that Government House reporter with the state-owned television station, Rasheed Mahe, be "queried and sacked" over alleged insubordination.

The governor was reportedly irked by several telephone calls informing him about a mistake he made in a broadcast he made on September 30, when he referred to his state as Kano.

Mr. Mahe explained that he was not present during the recording and the inability to detect the hitch was due to the lateness of the recording. He added that: "In spite of previewing the tape with my superiors, the mistake was not detected prior to the broadcast".

Mahe said all efforts by him to explain that a technical hitch made them unable to adequately edit the governor's broadcast were "construed as insubordination and confrontational".

He said the governor was also misinformed that he had "insulted and abused him". Adding: "I could not believe the accusation and my efforts to deny the allegation earned me the governor's anger, but I have answered the query and I pray for pardon".

Obasanjo Aides Seize Journalist's Camera

Security aides to President Olusegun Obasanjo seized a camera belonging to a journalist. The incident took place at the Presidential lounge of the Muritala Mohammed International Airport, Lagos, while the President was returning to Abuja from Ogun State, where he attended the ward congress of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

It took the intervention of President Obasanjo before the security aides could return the camera.

The security men had earlier denied seizing the item, but were forced to own up when the President said in Yoruba: O ma jade, meaning it must come out. They subsequently produced the camera.

The President cautioned the aides against molesting journalists or seizing items belonging to them saying they have a legitimate job to do and must be allowed to do so.

President Obasanjo said the security men needed a re-orientation from military mentally to a more civil behaviour. "Whenever you are with me, do not seize anything from the journalists except dangerous weapons. These people are doing their work," he said.

He reminded them that this is a new dispensation, adding that their attitude during the military era should be discarded. "If that was how you were trained to do when you were with those people (military) that should change".
JOURNALISM / PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS

A Guide to Financial Aid for International Students in the United States (Part 1)

There are a number of aid available from the United States government for students from specific countries. The most productive way to find out if there is any financial aid from the United States for students from your country is to contact the U.S. Embassy in your country or your country's embassy in the United States. You should also see the entries below for the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. There are also several Internet sites aimed at finding financial aid for students from both universities and private sources. Two of the most popular are: http://www.finaid.org, http://www.fastweb.com

The following organizations offer scholarships for international students:

1) American Educational Services
American College Scholarship Program

Contact Information:
Bill Sprague, Program Director
419 Lentz Court
Lansing, MI 48917-3797

Type of Financial Assistance: 1-year scholarship

Financial Information: Includes tuition; ranges from $1,000-5,000 with an average award of $1,667.

Purpose: To reward academic achievement and potential through study at an accredited junior college, college, or university in the U.S.

Number awarded annually: Approximately nine

Eligibility/Restrictions: Open to post-secondary vocational/technical, undergraduate, graduate/post-graduate, post-doctoral, and professional.

Application procedure/deadline: Application forms are available at the above address; applications are due March 1st.

2) Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
Mary A. Gardner Scholarship

Contact Information:
Jennifer McGill
University of South Carolina
AEJMC
1621 College Street
Columbia, SC 29208-0251
E-mail: aejmc@aejmc.org

Type of Financial Assistance: Scholarship

Financial Information: $300 plus a possible unrestricted grant

Purpose: To recognize outstanding undergraduate journalism and encourage careers in news reporting and/or editing.

Eligibility/Restrictions: Open to undergraduate students; must be enrolled in a news/editorial program for at least 2 years with a minimum 3.0 grade-point average.

Application Deadline: April 3rd

3) Fulbright Scholar Program
Contact Information:
Office of Academic Exchange Programs
Type of Financial Assistance: Scholarships for various periods of time

Financial Information: Awards vary according to length and host institution

Purpose: To increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.

Number awarded annually: Approximately 4,500

Application Procedure/Deadline: Journalists apply in their home countries at the Fulbright Commission/Foundation or through the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy. Application material, deadline dates, eligibility criteria and benefits information are available from these in-country organizations. Application deadlines vary by country.

Additional Information: Application procedures for Fulbright grants to study or teach in the United States vary from country to country. Fulbright Commissions or the American Embassies administer the program, with the assistance of local educational authorities and institutions. Fulbright Commissions and U.S. embassies can be found on the State Department web site at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/commiss.htm.

4) The Department of State; Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs;
Institute of International Education
Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program

Contact Information:
U.S. Information Service, Fulbright Commission
E-mail: hhh@iie.org
Web Site: www.iie.org/pgms/hhh

Type of Financial Assistance: One year grant

Financial Information: Amounts vary

Purpose: To allow professional candidates to pursue one year of non-degree graduate study and related professional experiences in the U.S.

Number Awarded Annually: Varies

Eligibility/Restrictions: Open to mid-career professionals in print and broadcast journalism from developing countries.

Application Procedure/Deadline: Please contact the U.S. Information Service.

5) Nation Institute

Nation Institute Internship Program in Magazine Journalism and Publishing

Contact Information:
Peter Meyer, Executive Director
75 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10011

Type of Financial Assistance: Internship

Financial Information: $75 per week

Purpose: To further education in magazine journalism and publishing.

Number awarded annually: Approximately 24

Eligibility/Restrictions: Open to undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate, and post-doctorate; must be fluent in English.

Application Procedure/Deadline: Applications due in April, July and November.
6) National Right to Work Committee  
*William B. Ruggles Journalism School Scholarship*

**Contact Information:**
Linda Staulcup  
8001 Braddock Road  
Springfield, VA 22160

**Type of Financial Assistance:** Scholarship

**Financial Information:** $2,000 plus a possible unrestricted grant

**Purpose:** For journalism/mass communication majors with a demonstrated understanding of volunteerism and of problems of compulsory unionism

**Eligibility/Restrictions:** Open to undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate

**Application Procedure/Deadline:** March 31.

7) Rotary Foundation  
*Multi-year Ambassadorial Scholarships*

**Contact Information:**
Rotary Foundation of Rotary International  
One Rotary Center  
1560 Sherman Avenue  
Evanston, IL 60201

Web Site: http://www.rotary.org

**Type of Financial Assistance:** 2-3 year scholarship

**Financial Information:** $11,000 per year

**Purpose:** To further friendly relations and international understanding among people of different countries.

**Number awarded annually:** Varies

**Eligibility/Restrictions:** Applicants should be proficient in the host country's language, be citizens of a country in which there is a Rotary Club, and have completed at least two years of university course work when the scholarship begins.

**Application Procedure/Deadline:** Deadlines are set by individual Rotary Clubs.

**Additional Information:** Rotary Foundation Trustees will assign host institutions to award recipients.

8) U.S. Agency for International Development  
*Partners for International Education and Training*

**Contact Information:**
1100 17th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20036

**Type of Financial Assistance:** 2-7 year scholarship

**Financial Information:** Includes tuition, travel, living expenses, fees, and books in various amounts.

**Purpose:** To support foreign nationals while they complete a degree program in the U.S.

**Number awarded annually:** Approximately 1,000

**Eligibility/Restrictions:** Available for undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate study at accredited U.S. higher education institutions; applicants must also be a national of a country with a USAID mission and must return home at completion of the award

**Application procedure/Deadline:** Contact the U.S. Agency for International Development

**Additional information:** USAID missions nominate candidates for awards
9) World Press Institute

World Press Institute Fellowship

Contact Information:
John L. Hodowanic
1635 Summit Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55101
E-mail: ullmann@macalester.edu

Type of Financial Assistance: scholarship

Financial Information: $25,000 including travel, living, housing, and health insurance

Purpose: To allow foreign journalists a period of study, observation, consultation, and training at Macalester College and elsewhere

Eligibility/Restrictions: open to professionals, age 25-35

Application Procedure/Deadline: December 31st

To be continued.

INDEX Invites Nominations For 2001 Freedom Of Expression Awards

INDEX on Censorship (INDEX) is inviting nominations from the public for this year's Freedom of Expression Awards. Coinciding with INDEX's 30th anniversary, this year's award winners will be selected by public vote based on a short-list chosen by a celebrity panel of judges. The awards will be presented at a ceremony on March 28, 2002, at London's Royal College of Physicians.

The award covers four categories. They include: Most Courageous Defence of Freedom of Expression; International Whistleblower of the Year; Best Circumvention of Censorship; and the Golden Raspberry Award for "Services to Censorship."

Burmese, Tajik Journalists Win 2001 CJFE Press Freedom Awards

A political prisoner in Burma and an exiled newspaper publisher from Tajikistan, who "demonstrate a commitment to freedom of expression" and who "overcame enormous odds to produce the news," have been awarded the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression's (CJFE) 2001 Press Freedom Awards. The winners, Myo Myint Nyein of Burma and Dodojon Atovulloev of Tajikistan will be presented the awards at a banquet on November 8 in Toronto.

Myo Myint Nein, a writer for satirical news magazine What's Happening to Us?, has been imprisoned in Burma since 1990, when he was sentenced to seven years for "organising youths and students to create instability." In 1996, he was sentenced to another seven years in prison because of his links with the "Press Freedom Movement," a local journalists' group.

Dodojon Atovulloev has been living in exile in Germany since May, when he fled with his family from Russia after receiving death threats. Before that, he had been publishing the newspaper Charogi Ruz in Tajikistan until 1992, when the journal's offices were raided. Atovulloev regularly published articles that exposed government corruption and alleged that President Imomali Rakhmonov's government was involved in drug trafficking.

Tajikistan government owns the only newspaper published in the country and denies access to critics. In the capital, Dushanbe, the government has refused to grant licenses to independent television stations for the past three years.

CPJ Honours 2001 Press Freedom Award Winners

Four journalists from China, Argentina, Zimbabwe and the West Bank who have "defied threats, braved bullets and endured jail to report the news" have won the Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) 2001 International Press Freedom Awards. They will be presented with the awards at a dinner ceremony in New York on November 20. The winners - Jiang
Weiping, Horacio Verbitsky, Geoff Nyarota and Mazen Dana - are being honoured for risking "their lives to challenge tyranny, oppose censorship and search for the truth," according to CPJ.

Jiang Weiping is currently in jail for allegedly revealing state secrets. Horacio Verbitsky is one of Argentina's leading investigative reporters. Since 1960, he has written stories which expose government corruption and challenge restrictive press laws. His 1991 exposé of a government scandal, which became known as "Swiftgate," forced former president Carlos Menem to fire half his cabinet. Reuters cameraman Mazen Dana covers "one of the most dangerous beats in the world" - the city of Hebron in the West Bank. Dana has been shot twice in the leg with rubber bullets by Israeli soldiers, and beaten unconscious by Jewish settlers. Geoff Nyarota is the editor of Zimbabwe's only independent newspaper, The Daily News. Since its launch less than two years ago, the newspaper has become the country's most influential voice, despite repeated attempts by President Robert Mugabe's government to silence it. For his work, Nyarota has been the target of numerous attacks, including a bomb that was tossed in front of the newspaper's offices in April 2000. In January 2001, the newspaper's printing press was also bombed.

“For journalists, the (Freedom of Information) Act will broaden their knowledge on how government works. It will aid them in getting whatever information they want from any government institution thereby reducing the chances and incidents of inaccurate reporting."

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