House of Representatives Passes Freedom Of Information Bill

Nigeria’s lower legislative chamber, the House of Representatives on August 25 passed the Freedom of Information Bill (FOIB). The House at its resumed sitting, passed the Bill with minor amendments and this effectively brings to an end the campaign to get the House to pass it. The advocacy efforts lasted five years.

The Freedom of Information Bill seeks to give citizens a legal right of access to information in possession of government officials and agencies, public institutions and/or private bodies carrying out public functions thereby eliminating unnecessary official secrecy. It also seeks to empower public officers to disclose public records or information without prior authorisation thereof provided it is for public interest and such officials are protected from adverse consequences flowing from such disclosure.

The FOI Bill is guided by universally accepted principles on the right to freedom of expression. These include: Maximum disclosure; Obligation to publish; Promotion of open government; Scope of exemptions; Process to facilitate access; Costs; Disclosure takes precedence; and Protection for whistle-blowers.

The process leading to the Third Reading and passage of the Bill began on August 5, 2004. At that sitting, the House began its deliberations from Section 3 and ended in Section 7, leaving out Sections 1 and 2 dealing with the Title and Interpretation.

The House amended Section 3 (1) which deals with the Right of Access to Records. It amended the section to restrict the right of access to records and information to only citizens rather than non-citizens as well as earlier provided for in the Bill.

Also, the House deleted the word ‘any’ from the phrase ‘any record under the control of a government or public institution’ which appeared in the same section.


Other amendments the House made were in Sections 14 (2) and 17 (3).

Section 14 which is one of the sections that details the grounds upon which a request for information may be turned down, provides in sub-section (2) that: “However, such right to refuse the disclosure of any record requested by an applicant ceases to exist where the interest of the public in having the said record being made available to them outweighs whatever injury disclosing such records would have to the aforementioned interests.”

The House amended this by adding the clause: provided that such public overriding interest is to be determined by a Court of law.

The House made a similar amendment to section 17 (3). It provide that: “Where disclosure of any information referred to in this section would be in the public interest, and if the public interest in the
disclosure of such information clearly outweighs the protection of the privacy of the individual to whom such information relates, the head of the government and/or public institution to whom a request for disclosure is made shall disclose such information.”

This the House amended by adding the proviso: subject to Section 14 (2) of this Act.

This implies that such public overriding interest is to be determined by a court of law.

With the passage of the bill, promoters will now shift their focus on the upper legislative chamber, the Senate and the Executive arm of government, for presidential assent.

Reacting to the passage, the Freedom of Information Coalition (FOIC) in a statement on August 26, said it welcomed the passage of the Bill by the House. The coalition noted that by passing the bill the House has demonstrated its commitments to the promotion of transparency and accountability in the governance process.

The coalition further noted that by passing the bill the House has recognised and extended an avenue to Nigerians to participate in the current democratic process through participation in policy debate, formulation, implementation and evaluation.

The coalition appealed to the upper chamber of the national Assembly, the Senate to follow in the right steps of the House by passing the bill within the earliest possible time.

Other persons and groups have also commended the House for the passage of the Bill.

The nation’s human rights community hailed the passage saying a phase in the struggle for the sustenance of democracy in the country had been completed. Hon. Abdul Oroh, a member of the House and ex-executive Director of Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) said the passage of the bill was probably the happiest day of his life in the House. He expressed amazement at the speed with which the Bill passed through the Third Reading.

Mr. Olisa Agbakoba, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) and former President of CLO said the bill was a fundamental advancement in the case of democracy. He added that the country was about to witness sunshine legislation that throws government’s business open for scrutiny. He however warned that practically, the bill may be passed and it would not work, but technically, it will open the door for citizens to seek and receive whatever information they require as of right that is justiceable.

The Executive Secretary of the National human Rights Commission, Mr. Bukhari Bello also commended the House and called on the Senate to take a cue from the lower house. He observed that the Bill seeks to promote good governance, accountability and transparency which are essential ingredients of democracy, social and economic development. He added that the FOIB has the capacity to improve the quality of governance and build the confidence of the people in the activities of government.

Mr. Chineye Nwabueze, a Mass communication lecturer at Anambra State University of Technology, Awka, commended the House for passing the Bill describing it as a victory for Nigerians.

Prior to the debates on the FOIB that led to its passage at the House, the promoters of the Bill led by the secretariat of the FOI Coalition, began a month-long petition writing campaign. The campaign was aimed at calling the attention of the House to the undue delay the Bill was suffering and urged the honourable members to schedule it for discussions and passage. The campaign started on August 2, and was intended to end on 27.

The plan also included sending a high powered-delegation to the leadership of the House in the last week of the petition campaign. It was one of the series of activities that the campaigners lined up and had started to implement towards getting the House to commence and expedite action on the Bill.

Alongside the petition writing campaign, members of the coalition embarked on an intensive text-messaging campaign targeted at members of the House of Representatives.

The Coalition also intensified its public awareness campaign to popularize the Bill among Nigerians. It trained over 50 members of the civil society organizations to improve their advocacy skills and knowledge and issued them materials to intensify FOIC lobbying; meetings with individual members, committees and caucuses of the House to secure their support for the Bill and vote massively for it whenever it was presented for the Third Reading. They also met with some ministers and presidential aides to seek their support.

The Freedom of Information Bill was introduced at the National Assembly in 1999. The Bill made steady progress through the lower chamber of the last Assembly undergoing the First and Second Readings as well as a public hearing before the Assembly was dissolved. The House however failed to pass the Bill.
Following the failure of the last House of Representatives to pass the Bill before the Assembly was dissolved in May 2003, the Bill was re-introduced at the new Assembly inaugurated in June. It went through two Readings. The committee of the whole House referred it to the House Committees on Information, Human Rights and Judiciary, with a mandate to study the bill in greater details as well as reflect the report of the public hearing conducted by the previous House.

The committees submitted a joint report to the committee of the whole House on November 5, 2003, with a recommendation that the House pass the Bill. Thus the Bill climbed the rung to the next level, the Third Reading.

Upon receiving the report, members of the House bandied various excuses for failing to hold the third reading despite having slated it for discussion on some occasions.

The current efforts to push for the enactment of a Freedom of Information Act in Nigeria began in 1999 when Media Rights Agenda (MRA) presented a draft bill to President Olusegun Obasanjo soon after his inauguration. Media Rights Agenda expressed support for President Obasanjo’s commitment to fight corruption in Nigeria but observed then that accountability and transparency could not be possible if citizens have no right of access to information held by the State or its agencies or if no mechanism exists for giving practical effect to the right to freedom of information. Media Rights Agenda, however, observed that accountability and transparency in Government were crucial to any meaningful anti-corruption crusade, arguing that accountability and transparency could not be possible if citizens have no right of access to information held by the State or its agencies or if no mechanism exists for giving practical effect to the right to freedom of information. It therefore requested President Obasanjo to present the draft Freedom of Information Bill to the National Assembly for consideration along with his Anti-Corruption Bill and to support efforts to secure its enactment. It therefore, requested President Obasanjo to also present the draft Freedom of Information Bill to the National Assembly for consideration and support efforts to secure its enactment.

The president merely acknowledged receipt of the draft bill but declined MRA’s request asking it to forward the draft directly to the National Assembly. He gave no commitment to support its enactment. MRA, subsequently approached some members of the previous National Assembly to present it before the House.

Since then a large number of civil society organizations and government agencies have identified with the bill and joined the campaign process to secure its enactment as an act.

The need for a specific legal right of access to public information in Nigeria arose out of the need to reduce, if not eliminate, the entrenched culture of secrecy in the conduct of public affairs and inject the virtues of transparency and accountability into the governance process so as to promote the social, political and economic growth in the nation.

This secrecy is entrenched by a plethora of administrative bottlenecks as well as legal huddles such as clauses which forbid the disclosure of information, usually under very broad “public interest” claims. Some of these include Section 168 of the Evidence Act; Section 2 of the Federal Commissions (Privileges and Immunities) Act, Cap 130, LFN, 1990: Section 10(2) of the Public Complaints Commission Act; Section 12(2) of the Architects (Registration, etc.) Act; and Section 13 of the Statistics Act, Cap 416, LFN, 1990. Other ways by which the government perpetrates secrecy are the use of Official Secrets Act and Section 97(1) of the Criminal Code. Even the courts of law are, in many cases, precluded from compelling the disclosure of such information.

Meanwhile, the scope and matters which fall under the “classified matters” category, are neither delineated and nor defined thereby putting at great risk an official who may wish to act in public interest by supplying public information at his/her disposal. The result is that civil servants have become unwilling to assist seekers of public information or give their views and opinions on public issues unless specifically authorised to do so by very senior government officials.

This regime of secrecy is clearly not in accord with Section 36(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which gives citizens rights to receive and impart ideas and information without interference.

The need for a freedom of information act has also been recognised by a number of international bodies including regional and world bodies such as the Commonwealth heads of governments and the United Nations.

The United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 59(1) at its first session of December 14, 1946, had stated that: “Freedom of information is fundamental human rights and is the touchstone of all
the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated. Freedom of information implies the right to gather, transmit and publish news anywhere and everywhere without fetters. As such, it is an essential factor in any serious effort to promote the peace and progress of the world.”

Subsequent human rights instruments emanating from the United Nations systems have also underscored this view in their wordings. These include Article 19(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which provides that: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this rights shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”

Nearer home, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights provides that: “Every individual shall have the right to receive information.”

These provisions and pronouncements evidence a growing recognition nationally and internationally of the obligations on governments to provide information to their citizens through clearly defined legal and constitutional procedures.

Numerous countries in the world, including South Africa, Costa Rica, Guatemala, India, Malawi, United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Sweden and South Korea, have constitutional guarantees of access to government-held information. Many others have explicit legal provisions on freedom of information. Sweden has had a freedom of information legislation for over 200 years. In all these countries, accountability and transparency in public life is almost legendary.

For Our Democracy, Lets Encourage A Right Of Access To Information

Dr. Lad-Ojomo, Honourable Chairman of House Committee On Information, made this presentation on August 5, 2004, during the House sitting, for the consideration of the Bill on Freedom of Information

Honourable Members, today we are challenged to enact a law that will guarantee transparency in all official transactions, ensure accountability in governance and safe-guard our nascent democracy. A call to duty at that. Daunting as the task might be I urge every member of this House to give the Bill, Freedom of Information (FOI), now before us the desired attention.

No doubt by the passage of this bill, we are throwing a searchlight on ourselves and every other person that occupies a position of leadership in the country: from the presidency to the schedule officers, both in the public and organized private sector. Yet we cannot do otherwise, after all, we accepted to be the ears and eyes of the people by the virtue of putting up ourselves for election to this Honourable House. There can be no better way of making ourselves relevant to the electorate and our constituents than giving them a package that gives them an unfettered access to information on how they are governed.

Apart from guaranteeing openness, fairness and transparency, freedom of Information Bill, when enacted into law, will ensure that public officers deliver available resources more efficiently and economically. This would therefore ensure greater goods for the greater majority in Nigerians, especially the silent majority. This is because having made it possible for the public to have access to information on documents and records relating to public matters as part of our national ethos, we would have invariably made accountability in governance, a must for all public officers.

As a matter of fact, unemployment, diseases, poverty, mass illiteracy, crime of various dimensions, declining standard of living, poor standard of education, and at governmental level, over invoicing, abuse of public office, 10% syndrome, failure and declining productivity of public facilities, among others, have become the order of the day. This is not because the country does not have the resources to tackle some of these problems. The country is blessed and endowed with both material and human resources. Our leaders know it and even say it. Rather, at the heart of these problems, is corruption. Thus with corruption, our God given resources are not used to better the lives of the citizens. Instead public officers use their offices to convert public resources to their personal use, under the guise of officialdom, often shrouded in secrecy. Situation like this perpetuate improper decision-making process, greed, selfishness, incompetence, ineffective service delivery process and general social malaise and economic degradation.

At the political front, there is complete absence of fair play and due process in the recruitment and distribution of political leaders. As long as these ills remain unchallenged by the public through a legally acceptable procedure, our fledgling democracy is in perpetual threat. Thus, as commentators on
the bill have maintained, a free press, a vigilant populace, visionary leadership and responsible executive, which Freedom of Information Bill intends to enshrine, remains a veritable means of ensuring the good health and growth of our new found democracy.

Coinciding with the virtue of this Bill is the fact that its enactment will be a tonic to the work of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). By extension, the enactment of this Act, will in many ways remove some of the hindrances in the operation of the Commission.

Honourable Members to round off, it is necessary to highlight some of the legal bases upon which this Bill is founded. Section 22 and 39 of 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantee freedom of information. Also, since Nigeria is part of the international community, and arising from the universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International covenant on civil and Political Rights, and Article 9(!) of the African charter on Human and people’s Rights which Nigeria is signatory to, all of which in parts espouse the rights of people to seek, receive information, I urge members to support this bill. Our democracy will be better for it. In constitutional democracy like Nigeria, the press (the watchdog) of the people have significant role to play. It forms the artery and life-wire of the public opinion. Where they play their role unhindered they constitute effective medium for the dissemination of knowledge, the yardstick of measurement of public opinion on matters of public interest and a veritable instrument of change and enthronement of social justice. As a result, subject to the restriction on the inversion of private rights, and prohibition of peddling of falsehood by the law of libel and slander, right to Access to information should be encouraged in the interest of democracy.

SSS Invasion Of Insider Magazine Draws Global Condemnation

President Olusegun Obasanjo’s government once again demonstrated its disdain for freedom of expression and the press as well as the rule of law with the recent government sponsored attack on journalists and the closure of Insider magazine’s office. Men of the State Security Service (SSS), Nigeria’s intelligence services on September 4, without any warrant, raided the premises of Insider Weekly magazine on Acme Road in Agidingbi area of Ikeja in Lagos. They broke into 16 offices at the magazine premises, arrested Mr. Raphael Olatoye, the magazine’s Head of Operations; and Alfred Aquah, a dispatch rider.

They confiscated valuable documents and about 15,000 copies of the September 13 edition of the magazine with the lead story titled, Aso Rock-Ohaneze Face Off: Condemn Biafra Now! No - Ohaneze. They also took away all the production plates, films and other materials related to the production, broke into the corporate safe of the magazine and took away important files and documents, and N500,000.00 (five hundred thousand naira). The operatives sealed the main entrance to the building which also serves as offices to four other organisations.

According to the magazine’s editor-in-chief, Mr. Osadiri Onazi, the security operatives broke the walls to enter the offices and confiscated valuable documents and copies of the magazine.

Again, at about 9.00am on September 5, about 15 armed SSS agents returned to the magazine’s premises in a mini bus and a Peugeot 505 Station Wagon with Olatoye and broke into some offices. They arrested two more staff of Insider Weekly magazine: Mr. Cyril Mbamalu, Sales Officer; and Paul Elakwu, a security officer with the magazine. They also carted away documents ranging from editorial matters, cash books, and production materials, including computer sets and printers as well as cash proceeds from sale of the magazine. The situation forced others to go into hiding. Mr. Elakwu was released later the same day.

Mr. Obed Awowede, Managing Editor of the magazine disclosed that Olatoye was forced to take the security men, after they had beaten him, to Netcom Printers in Ogba, printers to the magazine where about 15,000 copies of the magazine were confiscated while plates and other materials of the magazine were destroyed and Chairman of the firm arrested. The security men also allegedly ordered the stoppage of further printing of the magazine.

Mr. Olatoye was released on September 7 while Mbamalu and the dispatch rider were released on the 10th.

The SSS, in a statement issued on the night of September 4 and signed by its Director, Mr. Tunde Bello justified its actions saying they were legitimate. In the statement titled “The Storming of the
Premises of Insider Weekly”, the SSS said it had to act decisively “to arrest the deliberate mischief and misinformation contained in a magazine meant for the consumption of the Nigerian people”.

The statement accused the magazine of persistently attacking the person and office of the President and other notable persons in office. It alleged among other things that: “For quite some time now, the Insider Weekly magazine has consistently been attacking, disparaging and humiliating the person and office of the President and Commander in Chief as well as some notable people in government.” It cited some editions in which it alleged the media house committed the offences it listed above.

Some editions of the publication cited by the SSS statement that allegedly disparaged the president included: the July 30, 2001 edition with a lead story entitled, Aso Rock’s Power play; the November 18, 2002 edition with the lead story titled, Caging the Traitor; the March 3, 2003 edition with its lead titled, Obasanjo, Atiku Messy Oil Deals; and the October 27, 2003 edition with a story captioned, The Road to Tyranny.

The statement said: “… it is necessary to arrest the deliberate mischief and misinformation contained in a magazine meant for the consumption of the Nigerian people”. The SSS statement alleged that: “The magazine’s report that the Lower House quickly worked on the Bill and brought it back to the committee was false,” among other falsehoods it alleged the publication carried.

It stated further that: “The attempt by the publisher of Insider Weekly magazine to continually distort facts and misrepresent noble ideals of the present administration to the innocent public is not only libelous, seditious and subversive, but also treasonable. It is therefore unacceptable.”

It went further to say that: “The President also deserves respect as a person and that is part of his own freedom. Moreso, he is the symbol of our national identity. It therefore behoves this service, in an attempt at ensuring a fair treatment for all and sundry, to do something to stem this tide of irresponsible and unprofessional trend.

“It should be emphasized that it is unacceptable for a bunch of reckless and unprofessional journalists to constantly run down the high symbol of government in the country, thus exposing our democracy to ridicule and contempt.

“Journalism is a noble profession in which practitioners have the social responsibility to ensure the survival of democracy and, by extension, the unity and shared values of the country. Thus the profession cannot be left to mercenaries who are known to get paid to publish and be damned.”

The statement added that the Service has exhausted all avenues to dissuade the publishers from deliberately dealing in falsehood or at least exercise some level of restraint to no avail. It said it was therefore “left with no other choice than to act decisively.”

Individuals, as well as local and international organisations have criticised the raid on the premises of Inside Weekly magazine by men of the State Security Service (SSS), Nigeria’s intelligence services on September 4 and 5; the arrest of three of its staff members, and destruction of the magazine’s properties.

Chairman, Media and Public Affairs of the House of Representatives, Hon. Abike Dabiri condemned the clamp down describing it as a bad precedent aimed at straining government/press relationship in the country. She said the closure was an attempt to prevent the press from carrying out its constitutional role as the watchdog of the society.

She advised that: “Rather than reminding us of the ugly experience of the Nigerian press during the military government, the Federal government should resort to democratic norms by challenging any erring publication in a court of law.” She reasoned that the federal government ought to make a formal complaint to the Nigerian Press Council or the organ responsible for regulating the activities of the press if government felt it had been offended by any publication.

Media Rights Agenda (MRA), in a statement signed by its Executive Director, Mr. Edetaen Ojo condemned the action saying it was illegal, unconstitutional adding that there is no law in Nigeria that empowers the SSS to invade and seal up the premises of a news media. The statement also said the action undermined the spirit of Nigeria’s new democratic process and condemned the SSS attempt to justify the raid saying it was an insult on the intelligence of Nigerians.

Expressing grave reservation over the development, MRA’s statement said: “We are deeply concerned by the increasing resort by President Olusegun Obasanjo’s government to the repressive tactics favoured by military dictators only a few years ago as it represent clear evidence that we are still very much in the throes of dictatorship.”
The statement said: “The intimidation and harassment of journalists violates the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by Section 39 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as well as a number of international human rights instruments to which Nigeria is a signatory”.

MRA has also issued a global alert through the International freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) to governments, inter-governmental bodies, human rights groups, journalists and individuals around the world asking them to prevail on the Nigerian government to respect the rights of journalists to practice their profession freely.

The Nigeria Freedom of Expression Community (NFEC) comprising the Lagos State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Centre for Free Speech (CFS), Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Institute for Media and Society (IMS), International Press Centre (IPC), Journalists for Democratic rights (JODER), Lawyers League for Human Rights (LLHR), and Freedom House Nigeria described the SSS actions as “the most brazen attack yet on freedom of expression and on a media house in the post authoritarian era of military dictatorship.”

NFEC said its members were “genuinely alarmed at the new profile of lies, perfidy, distortions, and blackmail orchestrated by the SSS,” and bothered by the emergence within the rank of the SSS, of a new culture of lawlessness and arbitrary disregard for the rule of law. The Community condemned the invasion saying it violated the core principles of the Constitution. It debunked the SSS claims by which it justified its actions saying the agency had by its actions circumvented the laws by taking its brief and enthusiasm too far by seeking to crush an organ of legitimate dissent.

The Community demand of the SSS, among other thing, “that the SSS immediately unchain the Insider Weekly and immediately release the three staff still in detention; that the SSS immediately release all the production items of the paper it illegally confiscated; and that the SSS tender an open apology for trespassing the legal space of a legitimate Nigerian business without warrant.”

Three international human rights groups: Human Rights Watch (HRW); Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); World Association of Newspapers (WAN); and World Editors Forum (WEF) petitioned President Olusegun Obasanjo to express their concern over the actions of the agency and calling/appealing on to him to investigate the matter, release unconditionally those who ere detained, and ensure that the magazine’s premises are reopened and its employees allowed to return to work.

HRW in its letter signed by Peter Takirambudde, its African Division Executive Director, expressed deep concern over the raid on Insider Weekly and arrests of the employees. It reminded President Obasanjo that violations of the right to freedom of expression are one of several of its concerns about the current human rights situation in the country which it had discussed with him in June this year.

HRW expressed concern about these attacks “in the context of a broader pattern of abuses, intimidation and harassment of journalists, activists, and other critics of the government”. It also expressed serious concerns for the safety of other staff of the publication following intimidation of those arrested to disclose the home address of the editors.

Mr. Takirambudde then appealed to the President “to take immediate action to investigate the conduct of the SSS members at Insider Weekly magazine on September 4 and 5 and to ensure that the SSS immediately discloses the whereabouts of the two men arrested”. He demanded that they should be released unconditionally, “unless they are charged with a recognisable criminal offence and tried promptly according to due process”.

He also asked that President Obasanjo ensures the safety of other staff members of the magazine, reminding him “that freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, is a fundamental human right and an essential component of any democratic society. Journalists, the statement concluded, should be allowed to carry out their legitimate work, including exposing government abuses, without threat or harassment adding that the use of force, arbitrary arrests, and criminal prosecution can never be considered justifiable methods of responding to public criticism.

CPJ’s statement signed by Ann K. Cooper, its Executive Director, said it was “deeply disturbed by an alarming government attack” against the magazine saying the attack was fundamentally at odds with the most basic democratic principles.

It said the recent crackdown on the magazine and the pattern of official harassment against staff of independent media were outrageous and that it found the SSS accusation of libel, sedition and treason deeply troubling for a democratic administration that has sought to distance itself from the nation’s history of military dictatorship.
The statement urged the President to “ensure the immediate release of all the detained Insider Weekly employees”; that the magazine’s offices are reopened and its staff allowed to return to work without government interference. CPJ reminded him that censorship of the news is anathema to democracy and called for the return of all seized equipment.

The third letter co-signed by Seok Hong, President of WAN, and George Brok, President of the World Editors Forum, said the actions and any other contemplated against the staff of Insider weekly magazine constitute a clear breach of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria and other international instruments and conventions.

They reminded President Obasanjo that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights considers that “detention, as punishment for the peaceful expression of an opinion, is one of the most reprehensible ways to enjoin silence and, as a consequence, a grave violation of human rights”.

They urged him to ensure that those arrested were released immediately without charge, and that he takes necessary steps to ensure that the magazine is permitted to publish free without state interference, but subject only to the internationally recognized constraints of civil defamation.

Paris-based freedom of expression organisation, Reporters Without borders (Reporters sans frontières RSF) in its reaction said it was astounded by the reemergence of brutal practice by the SSS five years into Nigeria’s civil rule. RSF asked the agency to stop treating journalists like gangsters and called for its premises to be reopened, all equipment and materials confiscated returned to the media house and allowed to resume publishing.

It urged: “The federal authorities should ensure the safety of Nigeria’s journalists instead of putting them in jeopardy.” It observed that federal authorities are always ready to reiterate their commitment to press freedom, but violence against journalists continues while also reminding the authorities that Section 39 of the Nigerian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and receive and impart ideas and information without interference.

There is yet no letting of the Insider Weekly team. Following the raid and siege on the premises, the publishers published the seized edition in tabloid form and distributed to its distribution outlets. But the vendors of the magazine are being harassed, detained and copies of the magazine found with them seized. In the South-Western parts of the country, specifically Akure and Abeokuta, reports have it that SSS in these states were arresting newspaper vendors found selling copies of Insider Weekly. They are detained and as much copies of the magazines as are found with them are seized. Those arrested are accused of selling banned publication.

The story is not different in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory where newspaper vendors found selling copies of Insider Weekly magazine were being harassed. They are circumspect in selling the magazine to avoid arrest: they only sell to identifiable clients of theirs.

The publishers also report that the SSS said they should go to the agency’s 15, Awolowo Road, Ikoyi Head Office to collect their seized property. But they see it as a ploy to arrest them and have refused to heed the instruction.

In November 2003, three of its editors, including editor-in-chief Osa Director, were detained by the police for two days and charged with sedition and defamation of character in connection with an article alleging corruption by senior government officials. The case was however dismissed for lack of diligent prosecution.

*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 media 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.

**Executive Board**

Morenike Ransome-Kuti, Chair  
Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director  
Tunde Fagbohunlu, Legal Director  
Austin Aghonsuremi, Publications Director  
Eze Anaba, Director of Projects
Six Global Organizations Endorse Media Ethics Charter

Six global organizations have endorsed a set of principles designed to foster greater transparency in the dealings between public relations professionals and the media, and to end bribery for media coverage throughout the world.

The organizations are the International Press Institute, the International Federation of Journalists, Transparency International, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management, the Institute for Public Relations Research and Education, and the International Public Relations Association.

This is borne out of the conviction that one of the greatest challenges facing media today is the practice of bribery, which erodes public confidence, undermines professionalism and compromises ethical values, says the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

The Charter on Media Transparency, developed by the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), contains five principles. These principles are that:

- News material should appear as a result of the news judgment of journalists and editors, and not as a result of any payment in cash or in kind, or any other inducements;
- Material involving payment should be clearly identified as advertising, sponsorship or promotion;
No journalist or media representative should ever suggest that news coverage will appear for any reason other than its merit;

When samples or loans of products or services are necessary for a journalist to render an objective opinion, the length of time should be agreed in advance and loaned products should be returned afterward;

The media should institute written policies regarding the receipt of gifts or discounted products and services, and journalists should be required to sign the policy.

The charter has also been endorsed by Transparency International, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management and the Institute for Public Relations Research and Education (IPRRE).

It follows the IPRA’s publication last year of a global index, which ranked 66 countries according to the level of corruption among the media. China, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Pakistan were the top five countries. Countries where bribery of the media was least likely to occur were Finland, Denmark, New Zealand and Switzerland.

Nigerian press ranked sixth in the index, a position it shared with its Indonesian counterpart (see: http://www.instituteforpr.com/international.phtml?article_id=bribery_index)

**Nigerian Editors Brainstorm on How to Move the Nation’s Media Forward**

About 140 editors and other participants met at the MicCom Golf Hotels and Resort, Ada in Osun State from August 25 to 29, to brainstorm on efforts that should be put in place to pull the media out of its present distress and move it forward. It was an opportunity to do a self-critique of professionals and ethical issues confronting editors in the discharge of their gatekeepers’ role. The occasion was the first All Nigeria Editors conference (ANEC), organised by the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) with the theme: Ethics, Professionalism and the Nigerian Editor.

The editors reiterated an earlier call by the Standing Committee of the Guild for a stakeholders’ conference to discuss several issues that are affecting the fortunes of the media. Several media stakeholders from within and outside the country were invited and they presented papers on different topics related to media development. They included Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola, the Osun State governor; Prof. Kwame Karikari of the Ghana based media NGO, Media Foundation For West Africa (MFWA); Prof. Chinyere Okunna, Head of Mass Communication department of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, Anambra state; Ray Ekpu, President of the Nigerian Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN); and Ted Iwere, editor-in-chief of Daily Independent newspapers.

Other dignitaries who attended the Conference included Dr. Raymond Aleogho Dokpesi, Chairman of Daar Communications limited; Chief Ajibola Ogunshola, Chairman of The Punch newspapers; and Ayo Arowolo, CEO of Investment Club Network, formerly of Financial Standard among others.

The conference discussed issues that have to do with ethics and professionalism, creating a balance between social responsibility and business concern, remuneration and incentives. No less than 11 papers were presented during the four-day conference.

Prof. Karikari urged journalists to abide by the ethics of the profession. He cited Ivory Coast where the journalists in the country allowed themselves to be used by politicians. He said for them to maintain, their integrity, journalists must be honest, forthright, and dedicated.

Ray Ekpu touched the Media Enhancement Bill presently before the House of Representatives. He criticized the content and intent of the Bill adding that it had inputs neither from the NPAN nor NGE. He regarded the Bill as dangerous adding that it was flawed in many respects. The Conference in its communiqué and a paper presented by Ted Iwere praised the recent passage of the Freedom of Information Bill by the House of Representatives. They agreed that it would enhance the work of journalists.

Ayo Arowolo presented a paper titled Ethics, Professionalism and The Nigerian editor. He got a rapt attention of participants in his talk titled Retire Young, retire rich as a Journalist. He said it was a contradiction that journalists help others generate wealth but live in penury and went on to enumerate four ways by which journalists can generate wealth legitimately.
With the quality of papers presented, the dignitaries who attended, and camaraderie that pervaded the Conference, participants agreed that the Conference should be held annually.

They came out with a 17-point communiqué at the end of deliberations. (Communiqué reproduced below)

Communiqué Issued At The End Of The NGE’s First All Nigeria Editors conference

This communiqué was issued at the end of the 1st All Nigeria Editors conference (ANECD), organized by the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), at the MicCom Golf Hotel and Resort, Ada, Osun State, from Wednesday August 25 to Sunday 29, 2004. The theme was “Ethics, Professionalism and the Nigerian Editor”. About 140 editors and participants attended the conference, at the end of which the following resolutions were adopted:

1. That the Nigerian Guild of Editors should continue to encourage the highest standard of journalism practice in Nigeria and ensure that truth remains, unarguably, the most fundamental principle of journalism to which all editors and media practitioners must commit themselves.
2. That ethical universal standards of factual reporting, fairness, balance, accuracy and objectivity, are covered by the notion of truth, which the drive for personal and corporate profit cannot and should not diminish.
3. Given the special development needs of Nigeria, the drive for profit and commercial survival should not override the enabling desire for social development and economic prosperity.
4. While the editor must uphold the universality of the truth at all times, he/she should capture the essential of African meaning, yearnings and realities. He or she should create the real African image that transcends sectarian divides, while seeking to inform, enlighten and entertain.
5. Corruption is dangerous to society and can be extremely devastating to the media. Therefore, while acknowledging the attempt by the Federal Government to fight corruption and economic crimes, the conference calls on all media practitioners and stakeholders to adopt a zero-tolerance attitude to corruption in the media and indeed, in the society at large. In this vein, media proprietors are called upon to live up to their contractual obligations to media practitioners through regular salaries and incentives as well as the provision of appropriate work environment.
6. Although, the profit motive has come to define modern media business, media owners and practitioners are enjoined not to lose sight of their obligations to society.
7. The conference views with concern, the state of the national economy and calls on government and all citizens to demonstrate genuine commitment to the announced economic reform programme, since this constitutes the road map to national economic progress.
8. The state of Nigerian media today, urgently calls for a stake holder’s conference to discuss among others, the issues of declining circulation, high cost of inputs, high tariffs and advert sales and readership apathy. The Conference therefore, reiterates the earlier call of the Guild for the convocation of stakeholders’ conference, while calling on government to consider the classification of newsprint as educational materials for the purpose of import duty calculations. In addition and in order to promote community media, government through its regulatory agencies should consider significant reductions in the charges and fees imposed on broadcast licenses and equipment.
9. The conference noted with satisfaction, the passage of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill by the House of Representatives and urged the senate as well as the President to hasten the process of passing and signing the bill into law.
10. It regretted the high incidence of poverty among media practitioners and therefore, calls on journalists to cultivate a new orientation towards personal financial planning and investment. In addition, the conference called on stakeholders to, as soon as possible, establish a foundation for retired editors.
11. Lamenting the increasing rate of illiteracy in spite of the rise in the number of educational institutions in the country, the conference called on the federal and state governments to show genuine commitment to educational reforms.
12. To discharge their watchdog responsibility effectively, media practitioners are enjoined to read widely and update their knowledge in order to inform accurately.
13. The conference observed the scandalous neglect of training by media owners and called on all stakeholders to put in place mandatory training programme for all media practitioners.

14. Since the digital age has come to redefine global media business, all media practitioners are enjoined to embrace on-line journalism. In this regard, the establishment of an institution for on-line journalism should be treated as a matter of necessity.

15. On the Nigerian Labour Congress Reform Bill currently before the National Assembly, the Conference noted the reasons put forward by the Presidency in articulating the Bill and the current objection to it by Civil Society and Labour groups. It therefore, resolved that in the face of more pressing economic concerns, a forceful demonstration of labour should occupy the government now, and the nation’s workers should be allowed the right to determine the shape of their union.

16. The Conference resolved that the idea of an All Nigeria Editors’ conference is highly commendable and should, henceforth, be an annual event.

17. Finally, the Guild expressed their profound gratitude to the government and people of Osun State for their support and hospitality, special thanks to the various partners and sponsors for their support.

**Nigerians Denounce Journalism Practice Enhancement Bill, Call For Its Withdrawal**

A cross section of Nigerians has risen with one voice to condemn the Journalism Practice Enhancement Bill before the House of Representatives. They described it as anti-press freedom and an attempt by the National Assembly to gag the press. They have asked that it should be immediately withdrawn.

The NUJ had through the House of Representatives initiated the bill for an act to outlaw sensational reporting of conflicts in the National Assembly and inter-governmental rifts, with a prescription of up to 12-months rustication against defaulting journalists.

Titled: Journalism Practice Enhancement Bill, the legislation makes provision for the establishment of a Media Practitioners Complaints Commission (MPCC) in each state of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), with powers of taking disciplinary measures on media practitioners.

Under section 27 of the proposal, “A journalist shall not present or report acts of violence, religious or inter-ethnic or tribal conflicts, armed robberies, terrorist activities, national controversies, such as inter-governmental and or parliamentary conflicts, natural disasters, vulgar display of wealth, or other negative trends and tendencies in the society or polity, in a sensational way, or in a manner that glorifies such acts in the eyes of the public, or foreign observers.”

Violators of this provision, according to the bill, “shall be guilty of professional misconduct, and the matter shall be referred to the Nigerian Press Council by the Nigerian Union of Journalists, or any of its members or any affected persons, for appropriate disciplinary action, which may include suspension and or withdrawal of the registration of the journalists from the Nigerian Union of Journalists, and the Nigerian Press Council.”

Also, based on the legislation, publication of “inaccurate and or misleading” stories in the media will attract punishment for both the reporter and the media organization.

The bill also restricts publication of information on personal life of individuals to only when the publication is of public interest and is done to expose crime, serious misdemeanor or anti-social conduct, or to protect public health, morality, safety and the public from being misled by the individual concerned.

Also, if the bill becomes law, any journalist who solicits or accepts inducement to publish or suppress a story will go for a one-year jail term or pay a fine of N100,000.00

The MPCC, according to the bill shall have powers to initiate inquiries into cases of professional misconduct, summon people for evidence and prescribe punishment for offences perpetrated by newsmen. Section 37 says: “Where a journalist is found liable by the commission for professional and or ethical misconduct, it shall have power to reprimand, or suspend him for a period not exceeding twelve (12) months or impose any other appropriate punishment.

The bill further makes it mandatory to appoint media practitioners into the offices of minister of information, state commissioner of information and chief press secretary to the president, vice president, president of the Senate, speaker of the House of Representatives, ministers, governors and commissioners.
The legislation also reserves at least 25 per cent of board appointments in media establishments to registered, practising journalists.

It was sponsored by Ms. Abike Dabiri and 16 others, and has already gone through first reading in the House, but no date was fixed for debate on its contents.

Mr. Ray Ekpu, founding Editor of *Newswatch* magazine and president of News Papers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) faulted the Bill saying it was not all encompassing as it did not reflect the opinion of other stakeholders in the media business. He said: “I am not aware that all the stakeholders have made an input into the Bill.” He added that NPAN was not brought into the picture asserting that: “any bill that is going to affect the industry must be discussed and approved, not only by the NUJ, but also by the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), NPAN, and other stakeholders that may be affected by it”.

Media and Freedom of Expression group, Journalists For Democratic Rights (JODER) in a statement signed by its Executive Director, Mr. Wale Adeoye, on August 26 described the Bill as anti media and “a signal to the return of rule by decree”, and called for its immediate withdrawal. JODER said the Bill “is a return of Decree 29 of 1993 promulgated in the heat of the Ogoni struggle for self-determination and some aspects of Decree 4 of 1984 which conferred on the state, the right to determine what journalists should write and what they should not.” JODER also described it as a conscious attempt to legitimize media repression, using journalists as facilitators.

Azubuike Ishiekwene, editor of *The Punch* newspapers also castigated the Bill and its sponsors saying they were 20 years behind their time. He also, like JODER, compared its content to those of Decree 4 of 1984 which he said criminalized the publication of truth. Mr. Ishiekwene said reading through the bill twice, he still found it difficult to make a connection between the intentions of the sponsors and the goal of the Bill. He slammed several provisions of the Bill including the provisions that recommends that proprietors of media houses should maintain certain amounts of security deposits to be used to pay staff salaries in the event of business failure.

He also criticized the provisions that: fixed a minimum wage for journalists; a minimum of ten years experience as a criterion to be appointed as editor; and the right of journalists to acquire a maximum of 25% share capital of the media houses where they work etc. He recommended that it should be thrown into the trash can.

In spirited efforts to defend her role in the sponsorship of the Bill, Hon. Abike Dabiri, Chairman of the House of Representatives’ Committee on media and Publicity said the Bill was not intended to gag the press but to enhance the practice of journalism. She said Section 27 which has received so much criticism had been expunged from the Bill adding she will never be a part of any process to gag the press as she was a product of the profession.

The NUJ President, initiators of the Bill has also been defending the Bill claiming it was meant to enhance the welfare and the practice of journalism.

International Press Centre, Lagos Relocates To New Office

The International Press Centre (IPC), Lagos has relocated its office from number 42, Ijaye Road, Ogba to a more conducive environment at 11, Dideolu Court, Dideolu Estate, First Gate Bus Stop, Ogba-Ijaye Road, Lagos.

The Centre which still maintains its facilities now has a more spacious library and a new training room in addition to its conference hall and Internet Centre (Cyber Café).

According to the Coordinator of the Centre, Lanre Arogundade, “the new office environment has also enabled IPC to do some restructuring that would enhance its services to the media and other groups and individuals that make use of its facilities.

“The library is now more conducive to very serious research without the possibility of distractions. More importantly, it is now far removed from the conference hall so that sounds or discussions at the conference hall would not disturb library users.”

He explained further that the Centre now has a separate training room that is completely separated from the conference hall. It also promised to restore the Internet Services of the Centre in the nearest future.
The International Press Centre, Lagos commissioned on October 9, 1999, is a component of the Media-for-Democracy In Nigeria Project (MFD), established through the initiative of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Belgium, Article 19 (International Freedom of Expression Group), U.K, Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), France and the West African Journalists Association (WAJA) with the support of the European Commission is a not-for-profit, non-governmental, independent media resource centre.

It provides capacity building for journalists, render professional services to media groups and organisations and support advocacy for freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, access to information, self regulation, media independence and pluralism in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

IPC’s mission derives from the need to strengthen the media and the journalists in fulfilling their traditional and constitutional obligation of monitoring governance, serving as the society’s watchdog and promoting democratic values.

The Nigerian MFD partners - Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Independent Journalism Centre (IJC) and the Journalists for Democratic Rights (JODER) constitute the Board of Directors.

Kabissa Trains Crop Of Certified Internet Trainers

Kabissa, the Washington-based organisation that provides space on the Internet for African Civil Society organisations has successfully trained a crop of certified and skilled Internet trainers. Between August 23 and 27, Kabissa organised a Training of Trainers workshop at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) in Accra. Seventeen participants drawn from civil society organisations in the West African Sub-region, specifically, Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia, and Togo attended the training. Ms Margie Brand a trainer and the Executive Director of EcoVentures International, also based in Washington, facilitated the training. The training was interactive; adopting question and answer, group works, role play and simulations modes to deliver the essence of effective facilitation.

This is the third in the series of Internet skill-building trainings for African civil service organisations to be held in West Africa. The first in the series were two one-day trainings at Cybermart on Toyin Street in Ikeja, Lagos on 20 and 21 February 2003 with participants drawn from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Liberia and Ghana. The second was held at GIMPA and took place in September 2003.

Margie Band brought her wealth of expertise to bear in the five day training advising participants, whenever they carry out their training, not to assume the know-all attitude but facilitate through interactive question and answer rather than the lecture mode.

The five-day training was an integration of training on both facilitation methods and Kabissa’s four Steps To Success on the Internet.

The steps are: Connecting to the power of the Internet, Accessing information and opportunities, Interacting with like-minded organisations, and Establishing a web presence. Having reached this point, organisations are able to Advocate for their communities.

Margie disclosed that at any training, participants do not very often pay more than ten minutes attention adding that for a long training, participants and trainees very often get distracted after about ten minutes, trainers and facilitators therefore need to sustain participants’ attention. Trainers need to consistently renew participants’ attention time by various activities such as movement, writing, getting them to talk, standing, shop clapping, laughing, use of ice breakers, eye contact, and paraphrasing and summarising answers and sections etc. these and other activities call back participants’ minds from their distraction.

In her facilitation, Margie ‘wore different hats’: those of trainer, facilitator, observer, and learner. She also employed the attention-sustaining tactics she suggested like brief clapping, movements, group work, laughter, question and answer, self-selection, and assuming different roles with which she was able to sustain participants’ attention throughout.

Margie urged the experiential learning mode, the method through which the trainer/facilitator does his work step by step while participants practicalise what they are being taught and give instant result of what they are learning. She encouraged the adoption of three Ps: Posing questions, pausing for participants to think, and then Pouncing.

Virtually all the organisations represented at the training were connected one way or the other to the Internet and appreciate its powers and possibilities. They also use the Internet in their advocacy works.
Participants were also taken through how to access various information and opportunities on the Internet. They were taken through using search engines using the various features available e.g. using advanced search to restrict result, searching for only photographs etc.

In interacting with like-minded organisations, participants were taught such internet facilities as e-mail which included e-networking and e-newsletter; Instant Messenger, and blogging. They also listed ways of using these facilities to enhance their work, the similarities, difference and benefits of each of these facilities.

At the fourth rung of the steps is establishing a web presence. Participants were told that planning, maintaining, improving on websites were more important in establishing a web presence than web designing itself. It was stressed that a website needs to be dynamic: regularly updated and not static to make it relevant. Participants also listed benefits of planning a website before designing. These include encouragement of team work, focus, better impact, ability to identify purpose and fulfill set goals, and mitigating challenges that may arise now or in the future.

It was also agreed that working with external web designers have some challenges which may not be beneficial to organisations and these include high cost, difficulty of updating regularly when the need arises, the fact that they can let one down, and the fact that organisations can lose control of maintaining and improving their sites.

Organisations that are able to reach this stage are now at the stage of using the Internet as a tool to actively advocate for civil society communities. At this stage, organisations are actively utilizing the Internet: they have established web presence and identity, and are able to use it to inform their publics, organize people and organisations around their causes, and have the potential to mobilize international resources among others. They are also able to more effectively reach their goals and improve people’s lives.

The Kabissa five steps to success were put in a diagram with each of the step written in a rectangular box. They were placed atop each other according to their logical step sequence.

Participants went through the steps and assessed where their organisations stood and then made commitment on what they would do to move their organisations forward.

Generally, participants expressed joy at participating in the training. They commended the facilitation skills of Margie and the excellent materials prepared by Kabissa.

Obed Ebo Asamoah of the Presbyterian Junior Youth Ministry in Ghana, one of the participants said the Time To Get Online workshop was an eye opener to him as a person working in developmental work. He added: “The workshop using the Likert scale will be rated excellent with regards to its content and organisation.”

According to him, the materials used for the workshop (the Time To Get Online Simple steps to Success on the Internet Tool Kit (Version 3.0) “is a well thought out and planned resource toolkit. The pains and research that went into reviewing the earlier version 2.0 of the same toolkit exemplify this fact.”

He said the Workshop facilitation was superb with Margie Brand at her facilitation best and that Margie Brand was a Woman who is an epitome of good facilitation. “She makes facilitation look simple and it comes naturally to her. Participants after the workshop are never going to be the same since Margie has infected them with the ‘virus’ of good facilitation.”

“What is left to me as a participant is to integrate what I learnt into my work at three levels: My NGO (Friends of the Nation), The Western Region Network of NGOs in Reproductive Health, and The Presbyterian Junior Youth Ministry.” he said.

He commended Kabissa for the bold initiative and suggested that a website designing workshop should be organised in order to enable participants acquire the basic skills in website designing and enable them to be all round product and enhance their effectiveness to the civil society groups they serve.

Mexico Hosts Third International Conference of Information Commissioners

The Federal Institute for Access to Public Information (IFAI) will host the Third International Conference of Information Commissioners (III ICIC), from February 21 to 23, 2005, in Cancún, Mexico. The purpose of the Conference is to share experiences on the current situation regarding the right to access to information and the implementation of Freedom of Information Acts (FOIA) in
different countries. A further goal of the Conference is to promote the exercise of the right to access to information and contribute to the consolidation of a culture of transparency and accountability in Mexico and around the world.

The Conference will include core seminars in which national governments will share their experiences, as well as, various simultaneous working panels aimed at sub-national governments and where concrete themes related to access to information will be discussed. In those sessions we will debate the right to access to information and the benefits of and obstacles to FOIA, and will identify lessons learned from different countries during the drafting, approval and implementation of these laws.

Information on the Conference and participation can be obtained from Lía Limón at Av. México 151, Col. Del Carmen Coyoacán, C.P. 04100, Delegación Coyoacán, México D.F. Tel: 52 (55) 3067-2457, Fax: 52 (55) 3067-2400, ext. 5017, E-mail: lia.limon@ifai.org.mx.

Conference Of Non-governmental Organisations In The Commonwealth 2004 Holds In Johannesburg

The Conference of NGOs in the Commonwealth organized by the Commonwealth Association of Non Governmental Organisations, CANGO tagged “CANGO Johannesburg 2004 Conference” will be taking place at Intercontinental Hotel, Sandton Johannesburg South Africa from November 24 to 28, 2004.

The Commonwealth Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, CANGO is a free association of non-governmental organisations and voluntary associations in the Commonwealth united in the pursuit of common values of peace, global security, democracy, development, human rights and free trade. Inaugurated during the Abuja 2003 CHOGM, at Protea Hotel (Bolinga Centre), Abuja Nigeria on December 6, 2003, with over 100 NGOs from 12 Countries of the Commonwealth in attendance, CANGO is set to promote global peace, strengthen civil society and democratic values around the world. CANGO is not an arm of the Commonwealth Secretariat or Foundation.

Representatives of NGOs, INGOs and interested stakeholders wishing to present paper on any related subject matter in the area(s) of Human rights, fund raising, networking, HIV/AIDS, Gender, Social Justice, Accountability and Transparency and other specialized areas or research findings deemed vital to the NGO community are requested to send in an abstract of not more than one A4 page to cangohq@yahoo.co.uk complete with a CV. Time allotment for paper presentation is 20 minutes maximum.

Participation at the CANGO Johannesburg Conference 2004 is open to interested members of the civil society, representatives of intergovernmental, governmental, international, multilateral, bilateral and corporate organizations and also NGOs in any country of the world, especially NGOs operating in the 54 Countries of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Interested participants are expected to complete the registration form together with applicable registration fee of $400 which covers conference materials, conference bag, conference meals, attendance and access to all sessions, and an International Visitors Tour.

The Registration Fee should be made payable to “Commonwealth Association of Non-Governmental Organisations” in certified bank draft, money orders, traveller’s cheques, Western Union (Receiver: Dele-Israel) and sent to the CANGO Secretariat Address by courier, post or hand delivery. Payment is accepted in US Dollars or the Nigerian Naira equivalent at current official exchange rates.

Payment can be made directly to the following Account: Commonwealth Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, CANGO; Bank: Omegabank Plc, Ahmadu Bello Way, Kaduna Nigeria Account No.: A010A 5535-6, or at the registration desk at the Johannesburg Venue.

Air Travel, Accommodation and Visa arrangements are to be borne by prospective participants. Registration form is available and can be downloaded online at its website http://cangoshq.tripod.com/cangobase.htm.

Attending the Johannesburg 2004 Conference of NGOs in the Commonwealth provides participants with the following benefits: Opportunity to meet and network with other NGOs from across the world; Gain fresh insight into new trends in the non-profit sector; Acquire new skills and capacities for effective non-profit management; Build bridges for resource development for organizations; and Secure international and local partnerships;
It also provides opportunity to contribute to civil society development and be active in the global
civil society movement; meet people who are making a difference, share experiences; and market
organizations as well as promote organizational mission and image.

Towards achieving a conducive environment for a better world, CANGO is mobilizing a global
partnership and relationship paradigm with governments, intergovernmental organisations, well meaning
individuals and business, and NGOs. The Conference seeks to provide a matrix and platform for the cross
fertilization of business and civil society voices.

The 2003 Abuja Inauguration of CANGO was sponsored by Development Clinic International,
DECI, the United Nations Children’s Fund UNICEF, FedEx Red Star Express and the Conference was
held under the Commonwealth Social Platform organised by the Commonwealth Foundation. CANGO is
not an arm of the Commonwealth Secretariat or the Foundation, but an independent association of
voluntary organisations and NGOs in the Commonwealth. The 2003 Report is available on request and
further information is available on its website http://cangoshq.tripod.com/cangobase.htm
Deadline for all paper abstracts and all first registration status October 30, 2004.

ATTACKS ON THE PRESS IN AUGUST 2004

FCT Officials Arrest Newspaper Vendors, Confiscate Publications

On August 17, 2004, men and officers of the Abuja Environmental Protection Board (a specially
established squad comprising both the police and para-military personnel) in the Federal Capital
Territory (FCT) arrested about 20 newspaper and magazine vendors for allegedly hawking newspapers
and magazines on Abuja Streets. About 5,000 copies of the publications they were selling were
confiscated. They were accused of constituting themselves into street nuisance.

The personnel of the Board reportedly posed as potential buyers and summoned these vendors.
The unsuspecting vendors responded to the summons and were thereby arrested. The vendors were taken
to Board’s office in Area 3, Abuja.

An official of the squad claimed that the vendors breached the agreement reached with them
which says that the vendors shall not hawk their wares on the streets but build kiosks in designated
locations where they would sell their publications. The official said the agreement with the vendors
expired on August 16 following which the Board sent out its squad to arrest them.

The Chairman of the Newspapers Distribution Union, Mr. Simon Yusuf however debunked the
official’s claims. He said the vendors did not constitute street nuisance as they provided essential services
for a brief period each day and that they did not breach any agreement. He added that they had started
building kiosks and that they needed to adjust to the new situation.

On June 15, 2004, the squad arrested over 30 vendors for the same offence on the streets of Abuja.
The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) through its President, Prince Smart Adeyemi condemned
the FCT Minister’s directive.

Journalists Beaten By Policemen

Eight journalists were on August 18 beaten up by policemen at the Nigeria national Petroleum
Corporation (NNPC) depot in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital. The journalists were there to assess the
extent of damages done by the inferno that gutted the loading bay of the depot.

Journalists who went to the depot following the inferno were denied entry into the depot as the
depot manager was reported to have given orders that journalists should not be allowed into the premises.

One of the security officials was reported to have ordered the journalists to leave the premises
and not return threatening to make sure anyone of them who returns will not leave the place alive.

The Oyo State correspondent Chapel of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) has petitioned the
state Police Commissioner, Mr. Moses Anegbode condemning the action of police and urging him to
investigate the matter and bring perpetrators to book. The letter signed by Mr. Sola Adeyemo warned that
if perpetrators were allowed to go unpunished, it might signal serious danger to the lives of journalists in
the State.
Plateau Administrator Threatens To Deal With Journalists

The Plateau State Administrator, Major-General Chris Alli (Rtd.) threatened to invoke emergency powers bestowed on him to deal with any journalists critical to the activities of the interim State government.

General Alli said among other things that: “I don’t think we have any fear about what they have been printing in the press. We have tolerated some of them that we know. They want to cause problems in Plateau State but we are not going to let them cause the trouble, when it comes for us to use certain powers, we will use them and you will see.”

General Alli made the threat in reaction to a comment by one Alhaji Umaru who claimed that he was worried by certain newspaper reports that have created doubts in their minds about the process of restoring peace in the State.

The press has condemned some of his government’s policies describing them as misplaced including the purchase of 19 vehicles at over N100 million.

Newspaper Photographer Attacked

Mr. Sunday Eshiet, a photographer with Champion newspapers was on August 12 at Oshodi area of Lagos attacked by social miscreants popularly called Area Boys while taking photograph of the clash between them and the Police. They damaged his camera and confiscated it.

Mr. Eshiet said, while narrating his ordeal, the boys rushed at him beating and kicking him and in the process, they smashed his camera damaging it and the film in it. He added that he was rescued by the intervention of some Policemen around who saved him and also helped him recover his camera.

Journalists Arrested And detained

Two photo journalists, Alhaji Issa Musa and Alhaji Ahmed Yaya were on August 11 arrested and detained for over seven hours in Kebbi the Jigawa State Capital by the State Police Command for allegedly releasing photographs to ridicule the Jigawa State government.

The said photographs were used in and advertisement in which the advertisers countered the claims of the State government’s earlier published photographs of its success story.

The Jigawa State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) described the Police action as illegal asked the State Police to tender an unreserved apology. It wondered why investigations did not begin from the newspaper houses which published the said adverts.

The State NUJ secretary, Alhaji Mustapha Gide, warned that the union would not sit back and allow the police to harass its members. He called for an end to police harassment of journalists in the state.

Policemen Arrest Newspaper Vendors

Men and officers of the Nigerian Police during the month clamped down on news magazine vendors for selling their paper on the streets of Port Harcourt, the Rivers State Capital. They were arrested and detained allegedly on the orders of the State Governor, Dr. Peter Odili who was reported to have ordered that newspapers should not be hawked on the streets of the capital.

Reports have it that one Miss Rosemary Kalu, was arrested at Rumuokoro Junction and later detained at a Police Station near Obi/Akpors Local Government Area headquarters. She had to pay N3,000.00 to secure her bail from the station.

The vendors have however protested that they are not aware of any law that prohibits them from selling newspapers on the streets. They are complaining that it had become difficult for them to sell their publications with the result that they record a large number of unsold copies.

They have cried to the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) to intervene in their predicament.

The State Police Public Relations Officer, Mrs. Ireju Barasua denied knowledge of any law prohibiting sale of newspapers on the streets or the harassments and arrests adding that no such case had been brought to the attention of the command.
MEDIA/PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS

Panos, GKP Call for Submissions for Journalism Award

Panos and GKP are calling for submissions for the 2004 “Reporting on the Information Society” awards. The topic for this year is “Transparency, good governance and democracy: Do Information and Communication Technologies increase accountability?”

Four awards of $1,000 each will be made for the best journalism on this topic produced by journalists in developing and transition countries.

These awards, which were launched by Panos and GKP in 2003, aim to encourage and bring to international recognition thoughtful and incisive reporting that goes beyond describing information projects or new investment initiatives to analyse their social and political impacts and policy implications.

Print, radio, TV and web journalism are all eligible.

Interested journalists are required to submit a piece of work for consideration, send a clipping, audio or video tape, transcript or web reference by email to: award2004@panos.org.uk; or by post to Murali Shanmugavelan, Panos Institute, 9 White Lion St, London N1 9PD, UK

The work submitted must have been published/broadcast between 1 January and October 15 2004.

Panos and GKP invite journalists from developing and transition countries to submit work that has been or will be published this year in their own country or internationally, on aspects of communication, transparency and good governance. The work may focus on the role of any technology-assisted communication medium – internet and web, telephones, press, radio or TV. It can be any form of journalism and in any medium.

Panos London is an NGO which exists to stimulate debate on global development issues, including media and communication issues. Panos works with journalists in developing countries to produce news, features and analysis about the most critical global issues of today. Panos London is part of a network of Panos Institutes in eleven countries.

The Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) is a worldwide network of organizations committed to harnessing the potentials of information and communication technologies (ICT) for sustainable development. GKP is the world’s first multi-stakeholder ICT for Development (ICT4D) partnership at the global level, with members comprising governments, donor agencies, private sector companies, civil society, networks and international institutions.

Criteria and instructions for include the following: Only journalists who are citizens of or living in developing or transition countries may apply; The work submitted can be a piece of print, radio, TV or online journalism; A journalist can submit as many pieces as s/he likes; Types of print/web article that will be considered include news reports, features, analysis, interviews, opinion/think pieces, and editorials. Broadcast pieces can also include debates and phone-in programmes; There is no maximum or minimum length; and Submitted works should be stories or features relating to the question of whether or how information and communication contribute to transparency, good governance, democracy and accountability. The story can focus on any technology-assisted communication medium, but it will extend beyond merely reporting an event to analysing its significance in the light of the wider development issues and the concept of the information society.

The other criteria are: The work must have been published or broadcast between January 1st and October 15th 2004 (or publication/broadcast must be confirmed to take place before October 15th 2004) and applicants must provide evidence of this – a newspaper clipping, web reference or broadcasting schedule (or details of broadcasting – station, time, date, name of programme); Video material should be submitted in PAL format. Audio material can be submitted on cassette, or as MP3 files; and Print or online submissions can be in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese. Radio or audiovisual submissions in languages other than English must be accompanied by a full transcript in English.

Organizers say they are interested in stories that take account of gender aspects.

For entries that were originally in a non-European language, applicants are asked to state what language it is in, and give some information about the status and users of this language (eg “It is the language of the xx people, who live in xxxx. This language is not the main language of the state, but there is one newspaper and two radio stations that use it.”)
Applicants are to indicate briefly some other stories about communication issues that they would like to research and report on, for which they might use the award if they received it.

Reports that were commissioned by Panos are not eligible for this award.

Panos says it will auto-acknowledge email entry/ies from each contestant but anyone who does not receive one within 48 hours should send his/her entries again.

Submitted works should include: name, sex, employment (eg “Business reporter with the Zambia Daily News”), postal address, e-mail address and telephone number. They should be accompanied by a covering letter (in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese) and should give some information about the medium in which submission was published eg national or local newspaper, national or community radio.

Deadline for submissions is October 15, 2004.

World Press Institute Fellowships

Reporters and editors are invited to apply for the annual World Press Institute (WPI) Fellowship. WPI awards 10 fellowships each year to international reporters and/or editors.

It seeks to make it possible for fellows to report fully and accurately about the U.S. on the basis of personal experience and knowledge and training in the role of a free press in a democracy.

WPI Fellows spend four months traveling throughout the U.S. for first-hand knowledge of American governance, politics, business, educational systems, the media and current social issues.

Potential candidates must have a minimum of five years of professional experience and be fluent in English.

WPI’s guidelines and application forms can be found at its Web site: http://www.worldpressinstitute.org. Interested applicants can also request for forms from World Press Institute, 1576 Summit Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105; Tel: (651) 696-6360; Fax: (651) 696-6306; E-mail: wpi@macalester.edu.

Deadline for submission is December 31.

“The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people.”

Section 22, Nigerian Constitution 1999

Media Rights Monitor
Published by:
Media Rights Agenda
10, Agboola Aina Street
Off Amore Street
Off Toyin Street, Ikeja
P. O. Box 52113, Ikoyi
Lagos, Nigeria.
Tel: 234-1-4936033, 234-1-4936034
Phone/Fax: 234-1-4930831
E-mail: pubs@mediarightsagenda.org
Web site: http://www.internews.org/mra