



Resolution

From the General Meeting of the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX), held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on January 30, 2014

The first General Meeting of the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX), a network of African freedom of expression organisations which are members of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), was held on January 30, 2014 at Protea Hotel Balalaika in Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa.

The meeting, hosted by the African Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC), was presided over by AFEX Steering Committee Chairperson, Ms Zoe Titus, Regional Director of the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA), and was attended by leaders and officials representing AFIC, the Center for Media Studies and Peace-Building (CEMESP), Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda), Journaliste en Danger (JED), the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), MISA, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ).

The meeting addressed institutional issues concerning AFEX as well as the challenges of freedom of expression on the African continent. It discussed and approved basic working documents of AFEX such as a Host Management Agreement between AFEX and the host organization for its secretariat, MFWA in Accra, Ghana, and a Memorandum of Understanding to guide its operations and the relationship among its members. The meeting also discussed the AFEX Strategic Plan and deferred formal approval to a later date.

AFEX members present declared their commitment to making AFEX a strong, vibrant, united and democratic continental network of freedom of expression organisations that would work collaboratively to promote and defend freedom of expression in Africa.

The meeting resolved that AFEX and its members would embark on joint actions and campaigns to ensure access to information for African citizens, promote the safety of journalists, challenge impunity in the killing and other forms of attacks against journalists, bring about the repeal of repressive and obnoxious laws that curtail freedom of expression, among other issues.

The meeting also resolved to fight against the incarceration of journalists as a result of their work or for the peaceful expression of their opinions, describing the practice as a violation of basic human rights, including the right of free expression and a free media.

The meeting noted that the detention of journalists also interferes with the rights of ordinary African citizens to access information and diverse sources of news, which are critical for their decision-making in all aspects of their lives.

The meeting designated the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments as the foremost jailers of journalists in Africa with more than 30 journalists imprisoned for many years and resolved to mount an aggressive campaign against the situation. It also noted the appalling deterioration of media freedom and freedom of expression in Ethiopia where five journalists have been convicted of terrorism-related crimes.

AFEX called on African governments, particularly those of Eritrea and Ethiopia, to immediately release all journalists in their custody, and allow them to practice their profession without fear of imprisonment or other forms of harassment.

It urged African governments to stop the use and abuse of anti-terror laws to jail journalists for doing their job and to respect freedom of the media.

AFEX said it was appalled by the number of journalists killed throughout the continent while on the job, noting that Somalia and Nigeria have been Africa's deadliest countries for journalists for years. It called on governments in Africa to ensure safety of journalists and to end impunity for their killers. It noted that governments have primary responsibility for guaranteeing the safety of all journalists working within their territories.

AFEX also expressed "grave concern" about the existence in many countries on the continent of media laws, which fail to meet international standards on freedom of expression and which allow excessively harsh judgments to be handed down to journalists and media organisations and thereby undermine the right to freedom of expression.

The meeting urged governments to reform such laws to bring them into conformity with international standards and ensure that they better promote freedom of expression.

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