



World Association of Newspapers

ASSOCIATION MONDIALE DES JOURNAUX • ASOCIACIÓN MUNDIAL DE PERIÓDICOS • WELTVERBAND DER ZEITUNGEN

Annex to the Declaration of Table Mountain

Abolishing “Insult Laws” in Africa and Setting Free Press Higher on the Agenda

Noting that in country after country, the African press is crippled by a panoply of repressive measures, from the jailing and persecution of journalists to the widespread scourge of 'insult laws' and criminal defamation, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and the World Editors Forum (WEF) adopted the Declaration of Table Mountain on 3 June 2007 in Cape Town, South Africa, to which this report is an annex.

Through this Declaration, WAN and WEF state their conviction that Africa urgently needs a strong, free and independent press to act as a watchdog over public institutions, a crucial role that the press is hindered from and punished for playing by the widespread resort to 'insult laws' and criminal defamation.

The Declaration also stresses that press freedom remains a key to the establishment of good governance and durable economic, political, social and cultural development, prosperity and peace in Africa, and to the fight against corruption, famine, poverty, violent conflict, disease, and lack of education. In this context, WAN and WEF call on the African Union to include in the criteria for “good governance” in the African Peer Review Mechanism the vital requirement that a country promotes free and independent media.

The present report contains outlines of cases in Africa where the authorities have used 'insult' or criminal defamation laws or other restrictive laws or repressive conduct with the purpose to either censor the media or to prevent access to information. There are about 229 editors, journalists, camera operators, online editors, bloggers, and people conducting websites who have been affected by these incidents by being harassed, assaulted and/or beaten, arrested, detained or imprisoned in 27 African countries. This list has been compiled for the period 1 January 2007 to 31 May 2007. In addition, newspapers, radio stations and online websites have been closed.

The list is not exhaustive and there are gaps because of poor communication, censorship and fear of the consequences of disclosure. The actual number of people involved would be much greater than the total given above if it had been stated how many people were involved in some of the incidents such as when a radio station or newspaper was closed. These have been counted as single person incidents.

Algeria

February 19 -- Swedish freelance photographer Lars Bjork was arrested by government officials in El Aaiún for taking pictures of a demonstration by young Sahrawis waving the Polisario Front flag. He was interrogated, accused of being a spy, had his camera and passport confiscated and expelled the next day.

April 4 - Algiers Appeals Court imposed suspended sentences of six months' imprisonment and a fine of Dinars 50,000 (Euros 530) on Arabic-language daily ``Ech-Chourouk" editor Ali Fodil and one of his journalists Nanla Berrahal for defamation of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in reports which, it was alleged, ``attacked his person, the Libyan state and the security of the Algerian and Libyan states". Reporters Sans Frontier voiced relief that the court rejected the request of the prosecutor that 12-month jail terms and a fine of Euros 5,300 be imposed and the paper suspended for a year.

18 April -- Saad Lounos, former editor of the daily ``El Ouma" was given a one-year sentence for tax fraud on the basis of a complaint by the tax department about a tax adjustment dating back to 1995. He has been the target for prosecutions and judicial harassment for more than 10 years, as a result of which he has lost his newspaper and his printing company, Sodipress, once the only privately-owned one which printed several publications that the state presses refused to handle. He said the authorities had stripped him of all his resources. He is appealing.

26 April -- Arezki Ant-Larbi, correspondent of the French dailies ``Le Figaro" and ``Ouest France", was detained at Algiers airport as he was about to board a flight to France on the basis of a 1997 warrant when he was found guilty of libel as a result of a complaint by a former justice ministry official who complained of an article in the weekly ``L'Evenement" in 1994 about his department's slowness to respond to allegations of mistreatment of detainees in Lambose prison.

2 May -- The Polisario Front's security services detained for five hours Australian documentary filmmakers Violeta Ayala and Daniel Fallshaw near the Rabouni refugee camp, 25-km from Tindouf in southwestern Algeria, which they visit often to film Sahrawi families who are separated by a wall Morocco built a few kilometres from the Algerian border in the 1980s. The Polisario Front officials confiscated their cellphone and criticised the interest they took in black members of the Sahrawi population, among whom Ayala said she had seen cases of enslavement. After UN officials intervened, the journalists left the Rabouni camp for Tindouf, from where they flew to France. The Polisario Front has denied detaining the two journalists. Many cases of journalists being detained, expelled or even physically attacked by the authorities have been reported to Reporters Sans Frontieres.

Burkina Faso

January -- Two month suspended prison terms were handed down on two journalists, Germain Nama and Newton Ahmed Barry, by an Ouagadougou court for libelling President Blaise Compaore's brother, Francois, by linking him in an article in the monthly paper L'Evenement with the murder in 1998 of prominent investigative journalist Norbert Zongo. They were also fined each CFA fr 300,000 (Euros 450 or US \$590). The article followed a report in October by the Paris-based media rights organisation Reporters Without Borders that damning evidence implicating Compaore's brother in Zongo's murder was removed from an independent investigative report commissioned by the government before it was handed to it.

The report concluded that the assassination was linked to the journalist's professional activities. Zongo, director of the weekly magazine L'Independant, was found murdered on December 13, 1998, along with three of his colleagues on a road south of the capital. At the time of his murder he was investigating the death of David Ouedraogo, the driver for Francois Compaore. Only one suspect has been charged for Zongo's murder, presidential guard member Marcel Kafando, but he was acquitted in August. Six suspects, all members of the presidential guard, were identified by the independent investigators. An estimated 3,000 people demonstrated in the streets of Ouagadougou on February 3 to demand the reopening of the probe into Zongo's death.

Cameroon

25 May -- Georges Gilbert Baongla, editor of the scandal sheet Le Dementi in Cameroon, was sentenced by a court to a six-months suspended sentence for publishing pictures allegedly showing a minister involved in homosexuality, according to the newspaper Cameroon Tribune. He was found guilty of offending public morals and obscene publication and fined CFA fr 500,000 (Euros 750 or US \$1,000). The court described as ``noble" Baongla's campaign against homosexuality, but deplored his methods. Last year several newspapers stirred up a heated controversy in Cameroon by publishing lists of alleged gays, without providing proofs, naming among them prominent politicians, artists, sportsmen and clerics, apparently ignoring the fact that homosexuality is illegal in Cameroon and can result in a 5 year jail sentence. One editor was sentenced to four months imprisonment after a complaint by a government minister named in a list.

Central African Republic

13 March -- Editor Michel Alkhaly Ngady of the private weekly Les Temps Nouveaux and the president of local publishers' organisation GEPPIC, was summoned and jailed in a police station near Bangui's harbour over statements critical of the governmental High Communication Council (HCC). Ngady told Agence France-Press that the summons was linked to HCC President Pierre Sammy-Mackfof accusing GEPPIC of ``sabotaging the actions of the HCC". He remained in police custody, according to local journalists. Ngady had led GEPPIC and other local press groups in filing a complaint against the HCC over alleged irregularities in the appointment of some of its nine members. Local press groups asserted that HCC's authority was illegal as a result of alleged violations of the HCC's by-laws. Last month, the HCC, originally created as an independent body

with regulatory powers, had suspended the private weekly *Le Centrafriqu'Un* for one month. The ruling was linked to an article critical of neighbouring Chad's role in the year-long conflict against rebels in the northeastern part of the country. The next day, a GEPPIC press release called the ruling "null" and instructed the paper to continue publishing on account of "irregularities which have marred the appointments of certain HCC members". But the paper had ceased publication. Last November, Ngady was one of four prominent editors threatened with death by a government minister over their critical reporting of the conflict in the northeast of the country. On April 3 a Bangui criminal court sentenced Ngady to two months' imprisonment following his jailing on March 13 and imposed a fine of CFA fr300,000 (\$636) in connection with his statements critical of the governmental High Communication Council. He was charged with "resistance and disobedience to public authorities and contempt for the laws".

Chad

31 January -- Community radio journalist and human rights activist Marcel Ngargoto was detained by gendarmes in the southern town of Moissala without being formally charged. President Deuzoumbé Passalet of the Human Rights Without Borders (DHSF) of which Ngargoto is secretary-general said local authorities accuse him of a lack of tact in the way he reports "sensitive news liable to endanger national cohesion", pointing out that the print media are subject to strict supervision by a censorship office, while radio stations are banned from covering sensitive subjects.

13 March -- A court in the capital N'Djamena imposed a six-month suspended prison term, a fine of CFA fr 25,000 (US \$50) and CFA fr 500,000 (\$1,000) damages on Director Adji Moussa of the satirical bi-monthly *Le Mirror* on criminal defamation charges over a May 2006 story alleging that a Catholic priest embezzled CFA fr 17-million (\$34,000).

Democratic Republic of Congo

6 January -- Rigobert Kakwala Kash, the editor of the privately-owned weekly "*Le Moniteur*", was sentenced to 11-months' imprisonment for libelling the governor of the western province of Bas-Congo, the first journalist to be imprisoned since Joseph Kabila's election as president. The actual charge was that he libelled, insulted and spread false rumours. The day before his arrest, the High Authority for the Media (HAM) suspended "*Le Moniteur's*" licence to publish for six months following a separate complaint on the same issue by the governor.

2 February -- Radio journalist Nelson Ntamba, of Radio Communautaire Muanda (RCM), Bas-Congo province, who was interviewing the city's deputy territory administrator, Vincent Dikila, about the burial of military officers killed in fighting the previous day was suddenly violently seized by Commander Michel Mbuyi and accused of being a spy. Mbuyi and other soldiers who rushed into the room beat Ntamba for some minutes. He received severe head injuries from which he has not yet recovered. The fighting had been between government forces and members of a political religious movement and some 100 people were killed.

26 February -- The Kalamu Peace Court in the city of Boma, in Bas-Congo province, sentenced Popol Ntula Vita, a reporter with the Kinshasa-based weekly "La Cite Africaine", to three months imprisonment without parole and imposed damages of US\$6,450 for "defamation and damaging allegations" against Thomas Ndombasi, the local head of the public tax office and three of his colleagues in a 6 January 2007 article entitled "Alert at the Boma Tax Centre" which dealt with the misappropriation of funds.

March 2 -- Faustin Bela Mako, assistant secretary responsible for communications for the Lubumbashi section of the National Union of Congolese Federalists (UNAFEC, a political party in the coalition that contributed to the election of President Joseph Kabila) and publisher of a small newspaper, "Congo News", was severely beaten by 10 people identified as being close to Gabriel Kyungu wa Kumwanza, a provincial Member of Parliament. Mako wrote in the "La Fleche Hebdo", a Lubumbashi-based periodical, a commentary in which he expressed support for Member of Parliament Kisimba Ngoy, the national president of UNAFEC, who is accused by his party of having proposed somebody who reportedly does not actually exist as Minister of Foreign Trade in Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga's government. A Journalist en Danger official saw Bela Mako in his hospital room on the evening of 2 March and noted that one of his eyes was completely swollen and he complained of severe headaches. The police detained two suspects.

March 7 -- Acting under orders from Butembo Mayor Wabunga Singa, a group of police officers from the mobile intervention group raided the Congolese National Radio-Television (RTNC) local station in Butembo (North Kivu province), interrupting a programme about insecurity in the city. Two journalists, Lambert Kasereka and Aime Paluku, were assaulted and then taken to the mayor's office, where they were ordered to stop reporting on security problems in the city. An official in the mayor's office said RTNC continued to broadcast a civil society communique requesting merchants to observe a one day strike in protest at the violence by remaining closed on 7 March. The station went off the air later until late in the afternoon.

17 March -- Armed police acting on the orders of local police chief Oscar Malongi, Kasa district commissioner, occupied the premises of the community radio station ODL, in Luebo, 500-km east of Kinshasa, "brutally" stopped all broadcasts, looted and vandalised the equipment and chased staff members off the premises. They forbade all subsequent access. Malongi reportedly accused the radio station of broadcasting "insulting" remarks, "incitement to hatred", "spreading hate messages" and "inciting civil disobedience". The previous day it aired a critical interview with opposition provincial parliamentarian Bafuafua Kalala, the station's owner, who criticised the police for arbitrary arrests. Within a week of the closure, DRC's High Authority on Media (HAM) ordered the station to be allowed to resume broadcasting, citing a lack of evidence for its closure but the staff have still to be granted access to the station studios.

19 March -- Reporters Without Borders calls for the release of Bosange Mbaka, a reporter with the Kinshasa-based publication "Mambenga", who was arrested six months earlier in a round-up of presumed sympathisers of former presidential candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba. Nicknamed Che

Guevara, Mbaka is from Equateur province, a Bemba stronghold, and was arrested as he was about to hand to a guard post a mobile phone dropped by a soldier. RSF said he was held not because of the silly business of the phone but because of his nickname and origin and because of a corrupt and flawed judicial system. He was sent to cover a hearing at the Supreme Court in Kinshasa on 21 November 2006, when the court building was set on fire by protesters and clashes broke out between troops and Senator Bemba's supporters. He was interrogated about his work, his presence that day at the Court and, because he is from Equateur province, about his presumed support for Bemba.

March 21 -- Ten journalists and technicians working for three TV and radio stations owned by the defeated presidential candidate Senator Jean-Pierre Bemba -- Canal Kin Television (CKTV), Canal Congo Television (CCTV) and Radio Liberte Kinshasa (Ralik) --- went into hiding after the studios of the two TV stations were attacked and ransacked during clashes between Bemba's forces and government troops, who are believed to have attacked the stations. The attacks were launched after Bemba, a former vice-president, claimed in a Lingala-language interview that the army high command embezzled Congo fr 500-million (about US \$900,000) from the military payroll each month. Solange Kwale, a journalist with Antenne A TV station, Basile Olongo of Radio Lisanga Television (RLTV) and Abou Zanga of CCTV have been receiving death threats and have had to take special safety measures.

13 April -- After 132 days spent in the cells of Kinshasa's Secret Service Police and the city's main prison reporter/cameraman Papy Ntembe Moroni of the privately-owned Canal Congo Television (CCTV), was 'provisionally' released without trial but accused of "inciting hatred and violence, spreading false rumours and public insults". He claims he suffered severe brutality. Papy Ntembe, is a native of Equateur province. He is being held under special confinement and has been refused visitors, even his lawyer.

3 May -- During the first three months of 2007 Journaliste en Danger recorded at least 27 cases of attacks against journalists and the media. At least 20 of these cases consisted of imprisonment, assaults or torture, open or anonymous threats and destruction of media outlets. JED notes that more than 90% of the cases of violence against the press were committed by agents of the state, most notably the special services or civil and military intelligence branches. Journalists arrested by these services were detained for long periods during which they were beaten and tortured before being transferred to the central prison, where they were held for months before appearing in front of a judge. When journalists were arrested, beaten and imprisoned without being sentenced, their media outlets were occupied by armed men and reduced to silence.

5 May -- Jean Pierre Phambu Lutete, publisher of the Kinshasa-based bi-weekly newspaper "La Tolerance", arrested by the Kinshasa Provincial Police Inspection (IPK) unit when he arrived for an interview with Pauline Ipelueka, a senior official with Kinshasa's property tax office, to discuss a criminal case against her. He was charged with "threatening and attempted extortion" of Ipelueka. Lutete told JED from his cell that he had been preparing an article in which he criticised Ipelueka's recent appointment to a high-level post in view of the fact she was facing charges of "breach of trust" brought by the Kinshasa/Kalamu High Court's prosecutor. He also said Ipelueka had served

jail time and was only granted a provisional release a few days prior to her nomination. Ipelueka has since withdrawn her complaint, but the journalist was provisionally released only on May 11.

May 8 -- Michel Mutabesha Bakuza, a reporter with state funded public broadcaster Radiotelevision Nationale Congolaise (RTNC), was indefinitely suspended by officials in the eastern border town of Goma for allegedly "breaching the station's editorial policy" after he aired an interview with dissident Congolese General Laurent Nkunda "without prior consent from the station's management". In the interview Nkunda criticised the government over the pace of the integration of his troops into the Congolese armed forces.

RTNC Goma Director Gabriel Lukeka denied the suspension was linked to the content of the interview and characterised the move as "purely administrative". He threatened to extend the suspension to three months if the issue were more publicly discussed.

20 May -- The Mbuji-Mayi section of the media regulatory agency, Haute Autorite des Medias (HAM), suspended for seven days all broadcasts by the privately-owned network, Radiotelevision Debout Kasan (RTDK) after it accused RTDK of broadcasting two "defamatory" programmes on 15 and 16 May, of uttering threats against Ngoyi Kasanji, governor of East Kasai province and of "contempt, threats, and bullying toward the authorities". When asked about the nature of the threats, Faustin Mutombo Hanshi Hatupu, HAM's provincial representative, admitted to not having heard the alleged threats himself, but justified the suspension on the basis of RTDK's refusal to deliver audio and video tapes of the incriminating programmes to him. According to other sources, during the broadcast of the programme "Espace ABC", Auguy Ilunga, RTDK's owner, complained of being insulted by journalists from Radiotelevision Ocean Pacifique (RTOP), owned by Governor Kasanji. During another call-in programme on 16 May, a television viewer commented on the shortage of clean drinking water and criticised Kasanji for not fulfilling promises made during the last election campaign to provide the city of Mbuji-Mayi with water and electricity. RTDK is the fifth Congolese broadcaster this year to be censored for its coverage. The provincial authorities were accused of using the media regulatory body to settle a personal dispute.

May 23 -- Authorities in the central diamond mining town of Mbuji-Mayi closed down a private broadcaster on Sunday in connection with comments critical of the provincial governor that aired on two programmes the previous week. Police sealed the studios of Radiotelevision Debout Kasan (RTDK), based in the Eastern Kasan province, southeast of the capital Kinshasa, on orders of Governor Ngoyi Kasanji and DRC's High Authority on Media (HAM). In its ruling, HAM suspended the station for seven days on charges of "contempt, threats, and bullying toward the authorities".

Djibouti

February 6 -- The staff of the privately-owned weekly "Le Renouveau", mouthpiece of one of Djibouti's main opposition parties, the Movement for Democratic Renewal (MRD), including its managing editor, Daher Ahmed Farah, are being harassed by the police after the paper published an article about the arrest of a businessman involved in a dispute with the national bank president, who

is President Ismael Omar Guelleh's brother-in-law. Farah's home was raided twice. After the first raid, police arrested Hared Abdallah Barreh, an MRD member who is in charge of distributing the newspaper and Farah Abadid Hildid, who heads one of the party's federations. The two men were held at the headquarters of the police criminal investigation department while senior officials of the MRD were interrogated by the state prosecutor and the police and then released. The police raids and arrests were carried out as part of a judicial investigation into the article, which was headed, ``Omar Andid incurs the wrath of the authorities".

26 April -- Houssein Ahmed Farah, a contributor to the opposition weekly ``Le Renouveau" and member of the Movement for Democratic Renewal (MRD), was detained following accusations that he had written an article in the newspaper on 26 April that linked President Ismael Omar Guelleh to an alleged sex scandal involving a businessman from Dubai. Farah was freed on 13 May after a judge ruled there was not enough evidence to establish that he wrote the article. Within hours of his release, police from the department of criminal and special cases carried out another raid on Le Renouveau's premises in the capital's Hayableh neighbourhood, where newly acquired printing material was being stored, and have prevented it from publishing.

Egypt

22 February -- Secular blogger Abdel Kareem Nabil Suleiman (popularly known as Kareem Amer) was sentenced to four years' imprisonment on charges of disparaging religion (three years) and defaming the Egyptian president (one year). Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (HRinfo) Executive Director Gamal Eid said HRinfo would appeal the sentence. It pointed out that the sentence completely contradicts articles 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights signed by Egypt almost a quarter of a century ago. On March 12 the Alexandria Court of Appeals upheld the sentence.

February 27 -- Prominent independent newspaper editor Ibrahim Eissa of the weekly Al-Destour newspaper had a one-year jail sentence for ``insulting" the president quashed by a judge but was fined Egypt pounds 22,000 (US \$4,000). He was sentenced to the one-year jail term for carrying a story about a court case against President Hosni Mubarak. The original suit was filed by a private citizen on behalf of the president and, in contrast to the notoriously relaxed pace of Egyptian justice, the case was concluded in two weeks, according to Eissa, one of the fastest court cases ever witnessed in Egypt. Sahar Zaki, a journalist on the newspaper, was fined Egyptian pounds 22,500 (\$3,952), also for ``insulting the Egyptian president and disturbing public order". Eissa, long known for his confrontational attitude and his successful tabloid style journalism -- his papers are among the top sellers in Egypt -- and repeated criticism of the government since the mid-1990s, has dozens of lawsuits filed against him. He noted that his case takes place in an environment of bloggers being prosecuted and opposition leaders jailed. Eissa said, ``There was nothing illegal in what was written in Al-Destour and this verdict is still against the freedom of journalism and expression in Egypt". The verdict was also dangerous since it confirmed a practice of instituting proxy lawsuits. Journalists have noted that Mubarak has failed to deliver on a highly publicised February 2004 promise that he would eliminate prison penalties against journalists.

10 March -- The State Security Investigations (SSI) bureau of the Interior Ministry issued a report to public prosecutors that named pro-democracy activist and blogger Muhammad al-Sharqawi and 16 other bloggers, journalists and activists as being responsible for organising demonstrations and "spreading false news" that could harm Egypt's image abroad. The authorities subsequently charged al-Sharqawi with "chanting slogans against the regime liable to disturb public order and social peace", "insulting the president", "insulting and assaulting officials in the course of performing their duties", "calling for an unlicensed assembly", and "disrupting traffic", and held him at Tora prison.

April 15 -- Egyptian authorities arrested blogger Abdel Moneim Mahmoud, 27, and detained him for 30 days pending an investigation into charges that he belongs to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and that he defamed the government with his reporting. Mahmoud used his blog to expose torture of civilians by Egyptian authorities and the country's practice of trying civilians in military courts. Mahmoud's lawyer Islam Lutfi said "Egyptian authorities use temporary detention as a form of punishment", and could extend Mahmoud's detention by 15-day increments to enable him to be kept in custody for months.

May 2 -- Al-Jazeera and London-based daily Al-Quds al-Arabi journalist Huwaida Taha Mitwalli sentenced to six months imprisonment and fined Egyptian pounds 20,000 (\$3,518) by a Cairo criminal court for producing a documentary about torture in Egypt. The charges were "possessing and giving false pictures about the internal situation in Egypt that could undermine the dignity of the country". At earlier hearings the charges were described as "harming national interests" and "fabricating images prejudicial to the country's reputation". She was released after posting bail and is currently in Qatar pending an appeal.

Eritrea

January-May -- A number of the 11 journalists who were arrested in the crackdown by the Eritrean government on journalists and politicians who criticised President Issaias Afeworki's handling of the democratisation process in the country and argued that promised changes had not been kept remain in jail with no trials or access to legal counsel granted. Conditions in prison are harsh and medical attention is not available. In February 2007, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) received reports from Eritrean sources indicating that Fessehaye "Joshua" Yohannes, editor of Setit, died while in detention. The journalists were accused of receiving foreign funding, which in Eritrea can be considered a crime. Among those still in detention are Dawit Issak, co-owner of Setit, one of Eritrea's leading newspapers before it was shut down, and father of three. The family say they do not know why Issak has been kept in prison. According to RSF sources, Said Abdulkader, co-founder and editor of the weekly Admas, Medhanie Haile, co-founder and deputy editor of the weekly Keste Debena and Yusuf Mohamed Ali, the editor of the weekly Tsigenay, have also died in prison, but the Eritrean government refuses to confirm this.

Ethiopia

26 January -- Ethiopia Supreme Court rejected an appeal by journalist Abraham Reta of the privately-owned weekly "Addis Admas" and sent him back to prison to complete the remaining nine months of a one-year sentence he received in April 2006 for allegedly libelling three senior officials when he was editor of the now-defunct weekly "Ruh". He was accused of having no evidence for linking three senior officials to a corruption case. Imprisoning journalists in cases that date back years is common practice in Ethiopia.

9 April -- Ethiopia's High Court acquitted Kifle Mulat, the exiled president of the banned Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association, of the single charge of "outrage to the constitution and the constitutional order" over his organisation's criticism of the government crackdown on journalists and politicians in November 2006, according to local media reports. Later on June 11, an Ethiopian federal high court found two of the journalists, Mesfin Tesfaye and Andualem Ayele, who had been accused in a conspiracy trial since 2005, guilty of "conspiring to overthrow constitutional rule" and of "inciting revolt", which meant they faced death or life imprisonment. A third journalist, Wonakseged Zeleke, was convicted of the same offences and faces up to 10 years jail.

April 9 -- The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that Ethiopia's High Court acquitted and set free eight editors and publishers of Amharic-language newspapers who have been jailed on anti-state charges since a massive November 2005 government crackdown, according to local journalists and media reports.

The journalists are: Publisher Sisay Agena of Ethiop and Abay; publisher Serkalem Fassil and columnist Eskinder Nega of Menilik, Asqual, and Satanaw; editor-in-chief Nardos Meaza of Satanaw; publisher Zekarias Tesfaye and deputy editor Dereje Habtewold of Netsanet; deputy editor Feleke Tibebe of Hadar; and publisher Fasil Yenealem of Addis Zena. Their publications have been banned since the crackdown. The charges on which they appeared, which carried a possible death penalty, were linked to their coverage of unrest in the aftermath of the May 2005 parliamentary elections and the publication of editorials critical of the government's conduct. The charges were "outrages against the constitution or constitutional order", "impairment of the defensive power of the state", and "attempted genocide". The High Court also tossed out the genocide charges, rejecting the government's claim that press coverage had harmed the Tigrayan ethnic group, which forms the base of the ruling EPRDF party, according to the same sources. At least nine other journalists remain behind bars on similar charges, according to CPJ research. Ethiopia remains Africa's second leading jailer of journalists, behind only Eritrea.

13 April -- A video is posted on the Ethiopian Government's website and includes footage of two Eritrean state journalists, cameraman Tesfalidet Kidane Tesfazghi and reporter Saleh Idris Gama (both of Eri-TV) who have been secretly detained since their December 2006 arrest in Somalia near the Kenyan border. Reporters Without Borders said, "We are certain of their identity and of the fact that they are professional journalists who were sent to Somalia to work for the TV station that employs them". The documentary uses interviews with Eritrean citizens, including the two journalists. Their Eritrean passports are shown and what they say on camera, in Tigrinya, is simultaneously translated into Amharic. Tesfalidet is shown wearing a blue tracksuit top and

``seems tired'', according to one of his friends, now living in exile. He recounts how he was summoned to Asmara airport last December to go on a trip without knowing where. He only realised it was Mogadishu when they landed. The pictures of the men were taken while they were held in Ethiopia. Both men are described as Eritrean soldiers.

Gabon

3 March -- The official National Communications Council (CNC) suspended the private bi-monthly satirical newspaper Edzombolo for three months for allegedly publishing ``defamatory and insulting news directed at prominent state personalities'', according to local journalists and the news website Gabonews. The CNC did not identify the allegedly defamatory coverage though local journalists say it was a February 9 editorial critical of President Omar Bongo headlined, ``Omar does not control anything anymore''. The article alleged that Bongo had lost touch with the concerns of his people, becoming ``stubborn and deaf -- like a wicked dictator anointed by God''. Bongo, Africa's longest-serving head of state, has run the oil-rich equatorial African country for 39 years. The piece also discussed elections for an administrative parliamentary committee, which opposition parties had boycotted for alleged procedural irregularities. Bongo's ruling Gabonese Democratic Party holds 81 out of 120 seats in parliament. Edzombolo Director Jean de Dieu Ndoutoume said he expects to challenge the ban, claiming that he was denied a hearing as required by law and arguing that the suspensions exceeded the CNC's authority. Ndoutoume's paper has been harassed previously.

The Gambia

February 7 -- US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has appealed to Gambian President Yahya Jammeh to help free a pro-government newspaper journalist Ebrima B. Manneh of the Daily Observer, arrested seven months ago, but who has not been seen since. ``We call on you to do all in your power to investigate Manneh's whereabouts and to ensure his immediate release'', CPJ head Joel Simon urged. Simon said CPJ sources said Manneh was arrested from his offices by plain clothes security agents, a week after Gambia hosted the African Union summit in July last year. ``His whereabouts, the reason for his detention, his legal status and his health have not been disclosed'', said Simon. Gambian authorities have denied holding Manneh. CPJ said its sources believe Manneh has been held incommunicado outside the capital Banjul. International media watchdogs have regularly criticised Gambia for its crackdown on the media.

May 24 -- Reporter Lamin Fatty on the banned Banjul-based bi-weekly ``The Independent'', reappeared in the Kanifing Magistrate's Court for publishing ``false information'' a year earlier about a foiled attempted coup. The charge carries a minimum penalty of a year's imprisonment. Fatty denied publishing any ``false information'' as he merely gathered news and handed it to his editors who held the ultimate responsibility for publishing. He added that in any event, some of the story came from a government press release. He had been in jail for more than two months. Three days earlier the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and the Network of African Freedom of Expression Organisations (NAFEO) launched a campaign for an end to the violent attacks on

media freedoms and freedom of expression generally in The Gambia by the government of President Yahya Jammeh. On June 5 he was fined US \$1,800 or a year's imprisonment. Friends and colleagues helped to raise the money to avoid him being jailed. He is to appeal.

18 May -- Fabakarr Ceesay, a reporter with the pro-opposition bi-weekly Foroyaa Newspaper, was arrested and threatened by an officer of the Police Intervention Unit (PIU), a paramilitary wing of the Gambia Police Force, while covering a demonstration of students protesting at the arrest of colleagues. Ceesay was threatened with death and detained for about 45 minutes at the PIU headquarters in Kanifing, a district in Serrekunda, Gambia's largest city, before being released. When he realised Ceesay was a journalist, a PIU officer arrested him, seized his press card and threatened him with a gun, saying, "We can kill you and nothing will come out of it. . . You journalists are liars and unpatriotic".

Ghana

April 26 -- Reporter Kojo Hayford and cameraman Lord Asante Fordjour of Accra-based independent TV station, TV3, were attacked when they went to the office of Raymond Gbegoah, Coordinating Director of Akuapem South District Assembly in the Eastern Region of Ghana to seek his comments on insanitary conditions at a market in Nsawam, the district capital. Gbegoah, who was outraged by the filming of the filth without his consent, impugned ill motives to the journalists and chased them from the Assembly building and slapped the cameraman. Gbegoah said the filming of the refuse was intended to ridicule his administration and bring the image of the district into disrepute. A few minutes after the incident Gbegoah dispatched a team to clear the refuse. The Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) has threatened legal action against Gbegoah.

28 April -- Guards of President John Agyekum Kufuor prevented 19 journalists from covering the president's visit to Tamale, capital of Ghana's Northern Region, following a torrential downpour which flooded the city and destroyed several properties. Some of the journalists were roughed up and intimidated. Journalist Edmond Gyebi of the Accra-based independent daily "The Chronicle", said the intimidation and harassment began in Tamale Airport's presidential lounge, where they had gone to cover the arrival of the president at the invitation of Regional Minister Mustapha Ali Idris. Later, at the minister's residence, they were again prevented from covering the meeting. Journalist Mahama Shaibu, a regional correspondent for the independent Accra-based radio station Joy FM, said he was violently pushed by one of the security men the next day while reporting live from the hall where the president was addressing the people.

Ivory Coast

February 28 -- Stories critical of President Laurent Gbagbo led authorities to charge Director Denis Kah Zion and reporter Andre Silver Konan of the private daily Le Nouveau Reveil and director Jean-Marie Ahoussou and reporter Hyppolite Oulan of the private daily L'Inter in the commercial

capital, Abidjan, with offending the head of state. Zion and Konan were questioned for more than five hours and jailed for six hours in connection with a February 21 article headlined, "The 7-Year Record of the FPI Party: The One Hundred Crimes of Gbagbo". The story recounted alleged political assassinations and scandals during Gbagbo's rule. The two were jailed after Zion, who also leads an association of young journalists, refused to issue a public apology. They were provisionally released after supporters organised a rally in front of the police station and were due to appear before the state prosecutor later. L'Inter's story, reprinted from a Paris publication, alleged that a Dutch company, at the center of a 2006 toxic waste scandal, had agreed to cover repairs costing CFA fr 5-billion (US \$10-m) to the presidential Fokker-100 plane. The company, Trafigura, had announced 10 days earlier that it would pay CFA fr 100-billion (US \$200-m) settlement to Ivory Coast for the deaths of at least 10 people from exposure to waste dumped from a company-chartered ship, according to international news reports. Other journalists have been arrested recently. On January 25, Soir Info reporter Claude Dasse was held incommunicado for five days over a story critical of the state prosecutor.

Kenya

7 January -- "The Nation" photographer Chris Ojow was roughed up by President Mwai Kibaki's bodyguards when he tried to take pictures of the president during a Sunday service in church. Reporters without Borders protested that "the attack on 'The Nation's' photographer is the latest episode in a series of threats and physical attacks on journalists working for privately-owned media that appears to be the expression of a deep-seated and absurd hostility". When Ojow entered the Holy Family Basilica in Nairobi and went to the front row where Kibaki and other officials were seated, bodyguards told him he could not take photos of the president. Ojow replied that the president had already been photographed many times while attending mass. When Ojow tried to photograph Kibaki as he knelt to receive communion, a bodyguard grabbed him, tried to take his camera, bundled him out of the church by a side door and roughed him up with the help of another man. Ojow immediately filed a complaint at a nearby police station. The officiating priest, Father Samuel Mukua, apologised to Ojow but Bishop Maurice Crowley said Ojow should have asked himself if it was appropriate to take pictures of the president while he was praying.

6 March -- Damages of Kenya shillings 500,000 (Euros 5,500) or one-year prison sentence imposed in a Nairobi court on Mburu Muchoki, editor of the tabloid weekly "The Independent", for "libelling" Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister Martha Karua in a 2004 story headlined "Karua's father in abortion scandal". The charges were also linked to a story covered extensively in the Kenyan press alleging an affair between Karua and a Catholic priest, according to local journalists who stated that Karua never denied the allegations. His lawyer, Nelson Oundun, claimed that the outcome of the trial was influenced by the fact that presiding Judge Teresia Ngugi is a close friend of the justice minister. Oundun has appealed but Muchoki has been imprisoned in Nairobi's industrial zone because he is unable to pay the 500,000 shillings, which is 25 times the maximum allowable fine for libel, according to lawyer Oundun. Muchoki's imprisonment also contradicted a January 2005 pledge by the government to stop using archaic criminal laws for defamation matters, they said. She won an earlier ruling against Muchoki for the same story, but the judgment of 25 million shillings (US\$361,000) in civil damages was later invalidated because the prosecution did not follow proper procedure, according to Oundun. Muchoki is planning to appeal the latest ruling,

but Oundun said "unusual court delays in publishing the decision" allegedly linked to Karua's influence, threatened to hinder his appeal efforts. The Independent belongs to the so-called "alternative press" in Kenya, known for provocative reporting on sex and political scandals.

19 April -- The Public Services Ministry circulated an e-mail message at the start of April 2007 instructing public sector groups to cancel advertising placed with Standard Group Media which publishes "The Standard" and conducts Kenya Television Network (KTN) and to redirect it to other media outlets more favourable to government policy. The ban came after a year of tension between President Mwai Kibaki's government and the Standard Group. The Security Minister responded to disclosure of the contents of the e-mail by declaring, "The Standard" had "declared a war" against him and cited a recent report in the paper claiming that a government minister had approached Armenian organised crime members to assassinate former President Daniel arap Moi's son. After the article appeared, the newspaper's managing director Chaacha Mwita, Standard Group deputy chairman Paul Melly, operations director Paul Wanyagah and editorial director Kwendo Opanga, were interrogated for seven hours on 17 April without being able to consult with their lawyers.

Reporters Without Borders condemned the government's conduct and described the state advertising boycott as "not just a low blow, it is also unacceptable inasmuch as public funds should not be used for political or personal advantage".

Liberia

May 7 -- The government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf banned the Independent for a year some time before this date for publishing a "gang sex photograph" involving former State Minister for Presidential Affairs Willis Knuckles. Another newspaper quoted Information Minister Dr. Laurence Bropleh as informing a gathering of journalists on World Press Freedom Day, that the Government of Liberia was on the verge of lifting the ban because, according to him, Independent Managing Editor Journalist Dean had been begging for a pardon. Dean, however, denied he was seeking a pardon; he said he wanted justice in the paper's case currently before the Supreme Court of Liberia.

The "complete lie" about him seeking a pardon was a scheme to bring the newspaper into disrepute.

Mali

12 March -- Director Diaby Makoro Camara and editor Oumar Bouare of the private monthly Kabako were sentenced in Bamako to four-month suspended prison terms, fined CFA fr 50,000 (US \$100) and ordered to publish the court decision after convictions on charges stemming from a defamation suit brought by Planning and Land Development Minister Marimantia Diarra over a story headlined, "Consumed by jealousy: Marimantia Diarra raids his ex-fiance with the police". The article described Diarra's alleged attempt to stop the wedding of a young woman, promised to him in marriage, to another man. Diarra's lawyers said the story's "insinuations" were baseless. The defence presented several witnesses at the trial to back the assertions in the story but local sources

said the ruling was politically motivated due to the influence of Diarra, secretary-general of the former ruling party ADEMA, and an ally of President Amadou Toumani Toure. A date for the appeal hearing had not yet been set. "Sending journalists to jail for their reporting is out of step with Mali's democratic values", commented Committee to Protect Journalists Executive Director Joel Simon.

12 March -- The private Radio Jamakan in the central town of Markala, north of Bamako, housed in the government-owned Office du Niger (ON) complex, an agency managing irrigation projects, was given notice to "surrender the ON premises by March 31", after airing broadcasts critical of President Amadou Toumani Toure ahead of next month's elections. The station, according to the private daily, Les Echos, broadcast on March 3-4 a conference of the FDR party, the main opposition group challenging Toure's second-term bid in the April 29 presidential election. It was the second time in nine months the station had suffered official reprisal for critical coverage of the government. In July 2006 -- after it broadcast a conference of opposition groups critical of Toure, its power was cut and it now operates on a generator. ON Press officer Moustapha Manga denied a link between the broadcasts and the eviction notice, saying that all tenants of the 20-building complex, including another private Radio Deje, would "eventually" have to abandon the premises to accommodate a large-scale irrigation project but he could not confirm whether any of the other tenants had received similar notices. Independent Broadcasters Union President Yaya Sangare condemned ON's response, saying it was unreasonable to think that you can move a radio station overnight like a retail clothing store".

Mauritania

27 April -- Mohammed Ould Saleck, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Mutpache, a credit union for fishermen in Mauritania, angry over allegations of corruption against Mutpache published by "Tahalil Hebdo", an independent weekly newspaper, threatened to throw Isselmou Ould Mustapha, the paper's managing editor, into the sea for refusing to disclose a source of information.

24 May -- Abdel Fettah Ould Ebeidna, managing editor of the daily newspaper "Al-Aqsa", was illegally jailed in Nouakchott after he had been ordered to report to a police station by Judge Mohamed Talhata because of a libel complaint against him by businessman Mohamed Ould Bouammatou, who the paper had said was involved in a large-scale cocaine racket in the northern town of Nouadhibou, along with the son of a former president, a politician and the sons of several prominent figures. Under the country's new 2005-2006 press law, libel and printing "inaccurate news" are no longer punishable by imprisonment and a press and broadcasting regulatory body, HAPPA, has been set up.

Morocco

13 March -- National daily "Yawmiyat Ennass" correspondent Azzedin Gaiz, 44, in Khonifra, 280-km south-east of Rabat, tendered a complaint to the prosecutor's office on 30 January after he received several anonymous calls over a month telling him to stop writing if he wanted to live. The

prosecutor opened an investigation after hearing a recording of one of the threats, which Gaiz had kept on his mobile phone. RSF described this as ``a new attempt to intimidate a local correspondent who reports on illegal activities and abuse of power on the part of some local figures. He has written articles about embezzlement, implicating local officials and investigated illegal cedar logging by gangsters pillaging the region which has the country's largest forest reserves.

19 January -- The Casablanca-based weekly ``Journal Hebdomadaire's" managing director Aboubakr Jaman, faced with punitive damages awarded against it in a libel action brought by the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre (ESISC) resigned to prevent the authorities seizing the paper's assets to pay for the damages. This would have resulted in its closure. Jaman told RSF that his only reason for resigning was to keep the newspaper going. ``Staying on as managing director and therefore as the person legally responsible for the ``Journal Hebdomadaire' would have endangered its survival", he said. This had happened in 2004 when the authorities sold off some of the newspaper's property and seized funds directly from the distribution company Sapress as a result of an earlier damages award", he said. The amount on this occasion was Dirhams 3-million (Euros 270,000).

16 January -- A Casablanca court handed down suspended sentences of three years' imprisonment and fines of Dirhams 80,000 (Euros 7,200) on Arabic language weekly Nichane editor Driss Ksikes and one of his journalists Sanaa Elaji for attacking Islam and traditional morals in a feature about Moroccan humour. The court also ordered ``Nichane" to be closed for two months. The material appeared in a feature article, entitled ``Jokes: How Moroccans laugh at religion, sex and politics" and the paper was charged with ``damaging Islam" and ``publishing and distributing writings contrary to morals and customs". Prime Minister Driss Jettou was prompted to issue an order withdrawing the issue from newsstands and banning further distribution.

Nigeria

January 9 -- Nigeria's State Security Service (SSS) raided the Abuja office of a newspaper group which alleged that President Olusegun Obasanjo was a shareholder in a private airline, according to the official News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). Newspapers of the Leadership group reported recently that Obasanjo had shares in Arik Air, which began domestic operations two months earlier. Serving public officers, including the president, are forbidden under the law to engage in private business. The head of the newspaper group, Shehu Dauda, said that the security officers arrested a top official of the company and took some documents. They also invited Dauda for an interview on the allegations. It is not know what further developments took place, but it is likely that the matter was dropped.

3 May -- Cameraman Dare Folorunso of the state-owned Ondo State Radiovision Corporation (OSRC) was beaten unconscious by several policemen, including a deputy commissioner, while taking pictures at a May Day rally in Akure, in the southwestern state of Ondo, and is now in a coma in hospital. A policeman objected to Folorunso taking photos after some female police officers complained that the cameraman had recorded ``offensive" video of them. He tried to grab

his camera from him, although Folorunso explained that he was a journalist. When Folorunso defended himself, other policemen intervened and began beating him. Assistant Commissioner of Police Joshua Mumbo hit Folorunso several times on the head with a baton, only stopping when the bleeding Folorunso lost consciousness. Other journalists were beaten when they tried to intervene on his behalf. He was taken to hospital much later after another police officer and a state official intervened.

16 May -- Kola Olabisi, editor of the privately-owned weekly "Osun Defender", reporter Sola Jacobs and Amitolu Shittu, a human rights activist and president of the Committee for Democracy and Rights of the People, have gone into hiding after a court in Oshogbo headed by judge Jide Falola issued arrest warrants for them. This followed publication on 14 May of a report in the paper, headlined "Osun Police Arrest 764 Over Election Protest", about a news conference that Shittu gave in which he condemned irregularities in a trial of demonstrator. Meanwhile, journalist Adeola Balogun has been receiving death threats by telephone every since the "Saturday Punch" published an article of hers on 22 May about a possible case of baby theft.

23 May -- 100 supporters of local politician Christopher Alao Akala, some armed with machetes, burst into the headquarters of the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS), a public radio broadcaster in Ibadan, and ransacked it. Many employees fled, but others were trapped in their offices and at least 10 journalists received machete wounds. Most were robbed of their money and mobile phones and several cars in the BCOS car park were vandalised. The station has stopped broadcasting. According to local sources the attacks were triggered by BCOS's announcing that the state electoral commission had decided to go ahead with elections on 24 May, a move opposed by Akala, a former deputy governor who is the candidate of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) for governor.

Rwanda

19 January -- A Kigali judge ordered Agnes Uwimana Nkusi, editor of the privately-owned fortnightly "Umurabyo", to be placed in custody for 30 days while she awaits trial on charges of "promoting divisions", sectarianism and libel, a decision that has been criticised by Reporters Without Borders as being "unfair" and one which "rode roughshod over the principle of a presumption of innocence", given that the charges are "so political and vague". The detention order was issued by the judge of the Nyarugenge local court at the state prosecutor's request on the ground that Nkusi represented a threat to the country's security and to give prosecutors more time to prepare the case against her which was prompted by a column she wrote headlined, "You have problems if you kill a Tutsi, but you go free if you kill a Hutu". She conceded that the article could have had "a bad impact" and undertook to write another column correcting the position she took. Reporters Without Borders pointed out, "Even if Nkusi acknowledged that her article may have had a negative impact and offered to publish a correction, the judge has sided with the authorities and supported their evident desire to eliminate one of Rwanda's very few independent newspapers. If this case is to be handled fairly, Nkusi must be freed".

9 February -- Jean-Bosco Gasasira, managing editor of the independent fortnightly "Umuwugizi", was beaten unconscious by unidentified assailants in Kigali following, according to local journalists, a series of articles in his paper critical of officials in the government of President Paul Kagame. Gasasira was taken to hospital where he recovered consciousness but remained in a critical condition in intensive care. He was visited by Information Minister Laurent Nkusi who said the police had arrested a suspect, who, however, insists he had no role in the attack and was just one of several people who stopped to help the victim. Since last August, Gasasira has received repeated telephone calls threatening that he would be beaten to death, while he believed his movements were being monitored by military intelligence agents. He refused to disclose to the authorities information about Bonaventure Bizumuremyi, editor of the privately-owned weekly "Umuco", who went into hiding after he, too, was threatened and who was attacked by four unidentified assailants who wanted him to stop carrying reports critical of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR). "Umuwugizi" was also criticised by the Rwandan authorities for accusing Economy and Finance Minister James Musoni of favouritism, an accusation also made by "Umuco" and another independent newspaper, the fortnightly "Umuseso", and of lobbying to succeed Kagame. After "Umuseso" reporter Emmanuel Niyonteze questioned President Kagame about his rapprochement with Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo, he began receiving anonymous threats. The governmental press displayed hostility towards some news media, especially the US public radio station Voice of America (VOA), which it was reported had been closed for alleged bias in favour of the Rwandan opposition. French public radio station Radio France Internationale (RFI) correspondent Sonia Rolley had earlier been expelled without explanation.

13 February -- Journaliste en danger (JED), noted that since the beginning of 2007 arbitrary arrests and assaults of journalists have resumed in Rwanda, where criticism is not tolerated, creating a climate of fear for those who manage media outlets, particularly independent ones. It called on the authorities to either release or bring speedily to a fair trial radio journalists Dominique Makeli and Tatiana Mukakibibi who have been languishing in prison in Kigali for more than 11 years without being tried or sentenced. They were brought before a gacaca -- a popular tribunal set up to try individuals implicated in the 1994 genocide -- and were ranked in the top category of crime with the accusation of being "planners, organisers, inciters, supervisors and framers of genocide", a capital offence. Their trial has never started. JED also called on the government to guarantee all media outlets, whether state-owned or privately-run, freedom to report and broadcast news without being harassed, in accordance with media freedom codes that have been formally ratified by Rwanda.

16 February -- Congolese university professor Idesbald Byabuze Kataruka, who is also director of the "Mashariki News", published in Bukavu, South-Kivu province's in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, detained in the Rwandan capital of Kigali in connection with a 2005 report critical of President Paul Kagame, which he says he did not write. On 23 February, a court ordered him held for 30 days pending trial on charges of "endangering state security, segregation and sectarianism". These charges fall under the jurisdiction of the High Court of Justice (the highest court of law in Rwanda) and if found guilty, he faces up to 20 years in prison without parole or the possibility of appeal. On March 23 he was released with no charges preferred against him and deported.

6 March -- "US News and World Report" reporter Kevin Whitelaw and photographer Kevin Horan and journalist Jean-Leonard Rugambage of the Kigali weekly newspaper "Umuco" were detained by police while covering a hearing of a gacaca (popular court) at Nyamiyaga, 25-km south of Kigali. The journalists said the police accused them of not having accreditation to cover the hearing though they actually had accreditation. Whitelaw and Horan were taken to a police station where they were instructed to hand in their equipment, but Rugambage escaped. Following intervention of the American Embassy the American reporters were released three hours later but not before they had handed in the memory card containing photographs of the trial.

April 20 -- A court in the capital, Kigali, sentenced Agnès Nkusi-Uwimana, director of the bi-monthly journal Umurabyo, to a year in prison on charges arising from the publication of an unsigned reader's letter on January 1 that compared ethnic killings during President Paul Kagame's Tutsi-dominated administration to those of the previous Hutu regime. Nkusi-Uwimana who had been in jail since January 12 was convicted of divisionism, sectarianism, and libel and also ordered to pay damages of Rwandan fr 400,000 (\$760). She pleaded guilty to the charges in exchange for a reduction in the five-year sentence sought by the state prosecutor. She was not defended by a lawyer but planned to file an appeal.

Senegal

15 March -- Director Jean Menssa Diop and reporter Faydy Drame of Walf Grand-Place, a daily publication of the leading independent Wal Fadji media group, were each sentenced by a court in the capital of Dakar to six-month suspended prison terms and damages of CFA fr10-million (US \$21,000) on criminal defamation charges related to a June 2006 story about a consumer complaint against a car dealership. The men were free pending an appeal. The claim was from Matforce Hyundai car dealership over two articles relating to the dealer's dispute with a business executive over the sale of allegedly defective vehicles. Matforce alleged it was defamed by the business executive. The Committee to Protect Journalists called on the appeals court to overturn the criminal convictions and prison sentences of the two men and urge President Abdoulaye Wade to honour his pledge in 2004 to decriminalise defamation. Journalists should not be imprisoned for what they write, it said. Despite the pledge the authorities continued to sentence journalists under a provision of the Senegalese penal code and in a pending criminal defamation suit, presidential lawyer Ousmane Seye is expected to request CFA fr 500-million (US \$1-million) in damages against director Mamadou Biaye and reporter Ndiaga Ndiaye of the private daily Le Quotidien over a March 8 article critical of Seye. During the presidential campaign, Wade was quoted as saying that his only serious challengers were "a part of the press", according to Agence France-Presse. Journalists requested that Matforce refer the articles to the Council for the Respect of Professional Ethics, an advisory body known by its French acronym of CRED.

18 April -- Critical comments about the June parliamentary elections by an anonymous caller to a private radio station call-in programme resulted in ruling party politician Moustapha Cisse and his supporters threatening staffers at the station in the town of Mbacke, 168-km (105 miles) east of the capital Dakar, according to local journalists and media reports. The politician threatened to harm

any journalist who mentioned his name and he warned he would "send vandals to ransack your radio". He also asked Station Director Ibrahima Benjamin Diagne, 2003 winner of Radio France Internationale's best radio report award, to reveal the name and telephone number of the caller but Diagne refused. Diagne said after he called police the group left but he received numerous threatening phone calls from the politician and his supporters. The politician denies all the accusations.

Somalia

17 January -- The transitional government's National Security Agency chief Col Ahmed Hassan Ali sent letters on 15 January to the managers of Radio Shabelle, HornAfrik, Capital Voice and Radio Quran Kariim (Holy Koran) ordering them to suspend broadcasting and summoning them to his offices for "instructions concerning their work". Although the government gave no reason for the measures, the four Mogadishu-based radio stations have often been accused of bias in favour of the Union of Islamic Courts, the alliance that controlled Mogadishu until it was ousted by government forces at the end of December 2006. After a 16 January meeting lasting several hours, government spokesman Abdirahman Dinari announced that the four radio stations were "authorised to go back to work". In return, the radio stations undertook to "protect national security interests and to cooperate with the government", according to the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ). The Mogadishu TV bureaus of the Qatari TV news station Al Jazeera and Shabelle Media Network were also ordered to close on January 15 but likewise told they could go back to work. HornAfrik, the first independent radio network in Somalia, was the winner of the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE's) 2002 International Press Freedom Award for its work in the face of intimidation and threats in a society where there is no one to protest to and no protection of freedom of the press. Later, on March 23, satellite TV broadcaster Al Jazeera was closed again for an indefinite period by the National Security Agency. The Somali Information Minister Madobe Nunow Mohamed said, "Al-Jazeera has conveyed the wrong messages to the world. We will shut down additional radio stations and channels if they distort facts". Since opening its bureau in Mogadishu in May 2006, Al-Jazeera has provided extensive Arabic and English coverage of Somalia. The network vowed to continue reporting the conflict in Somalia from other sources and locations as it did in the past when previous governments closed its offices.

26 January -- Reporters Without Borders (RSF) welcomed the release of journalist Hassan Mohammed Abikar of Radio Quran Karim (The Voice of the Holy Koran) after 19 days in detention. Abikar, his station's correspondent in the Lower Shabelle region, has been able to go back to work in Afgoye (30-km outside Mogadishu), but no one has explained why he was held incommunicado for so long after being arrested by government militiamen in the southwestern city of Baidoa.

19 February -- The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) backed Somali journalists calling for a full investigation into the killing of influential radio network Radio Warsan presenter and National Union of Somali Journalists activist Ali Mohammed Omar who was set upon and shot dead on his way home in the early evening of February 16 by three unidentified assailants in Baidoa of Bay region in south-western Somalia. The attackers ordered him to stop and then shot

him dead as he tried to flee. His union praised his courage and said his work had been an inspiration to the Somali media community. Radio Warsan, a privately-owned station, was closed several times because of its "negative" reporting, according to ministers involved in the national security agency. It only resumed operations on February 9 after agreement with the national security agency of the transitional government in the region. The only privately-owned broadcaster based in Baidoa, Radio Warsan is known for covering Somali politics in an independent and critical fashion, unlike other privately-owned radio stations which often side with one or other of the warring parties. The IFJ said it feared that Omar was the victim of a targeted attack in a region where journalists had been murdered in the last three years.

6 March -- Publisher Yusuf Abdi Gabobe of the privately-owned daily "Haatuf" was sentenced during a trial inside a police training centre in Mandera (60-km northeast of Hargeisa) to two years' imprisonment for "reporting false information about the government, insulting the president by discrediting him and his family and creating inter-communal tension". After meeting with the Somaliland Journalists' Association (SOLJA), Somaliland President Dahir Riyale Kahin said on 21 February that he was ready to pardon "Haatuf's" journalists if they were convicted and it appears that they were released on March 19. The newspaper's editor-in-chief, Ali Abdi Dini, and its correspondent in the northwestern Awdal region, Mohamed Omar Sheik, were sentenced to two years and five months in prison, as was a third journalist, Ibrahim Mohamed Rashid Fara, who was tried in absentia, all for allegedly defaming the government, the president and his family. The court also fined the newspaper Somali shillings 5-million (US \$800) and revoked "Haatuf's" licence but the paper appeared as usual on March 5. The four journalists were convicted under Somalia's 1962 Criminal Code, although the media laws contained in the code were rendered obsolete by the adoption of new legislation in 2004. The court refused to try the journalists on the basis of the more recent legislation.

9 March -- Reporter Hassan Sade Dhaqane, of private HornAfrik radio, the country's first independent broadcaster, was arrested by three security agents while reporting on a security operation by peacekeeping Ugandan troops near Mogadishu's airport, and was held incommunicado and without being charged by Somalia's Ethiopian-backed transitional government. The reason for Dhaqane's arrest remains unknown, according to the National Union of Somali Journalists, which has also reported that several journalists were attacked at the same time while covering the security situation in Mogadishu. On March 5, reporters Ismail Ali Abdi, Mohammed Ibrahim Raggeh and Mohammed Ibrahim Ali "Ruush" of private Radio Shabelle were attacked by Ethiopian troops while reporting on a story at a government building. The attack came a day after another Shabelle reporter, Abdirahman Yusuf "Al-Adala", was beaten by government forces while reporting on the plight of residents fleeing the violence in Mogadishu. On February 19, the transitional government ordered three private stations to censor their reporting on government military operations and the flight of civilians from the capital.

12 March -- The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) condemned attacks on four reporters by soldiers in Somalia and called on the African Union President John Kufuor (the Ghana President) and AU Commission President Alpha Konare to protect journalists and put pressure on the Somali government to stop their troops from targeting journalists. Ibraahim Ruush, Ismaciil Cali Cabdi and Max'ed Ibraahim, three reporters working for private media group Shabelle Media

Network (SMN) who were reporting on an attack on an Ethiopian troop base the previous night, were forced to lie on the ground where they were beaten and their recording materials taken. They were released after being detained for an hour. On March 11, another SMN journalist Abdirahman Aladalla was beaten and detained by Transitional Federal Government (TFG) soldiers in Darmoley, 15-km south of Mogadishu. According to an SMN report, the soldiers asked Aladalla if he was an Islamist or Al-Qaeda member. He was released after three hours with injuries to an arm. The previous day, private radio station HornAfrik Radio journalist Hassan Sadeh Dhaqane, was reporting on an attack on African Union troops at the Mogadishu airport, was arrested in Mogadishu and is still being detained. The IFJ said that "We are worried that some pro-government forces are treating journalists like their enemies".

21 March -- Radio Shabelle reporter Mohammed Bashir Sheik Abdirahman and his driver Osman Qoryoley were arrested after taking pictures at Mogadishu airport where Prime Minister Ali Mohammed Ghedi was due to hold a press conference and held for three days with no reasons being given. They were released three days later, on 24 March. Abdirahman told his station they were "treated well" and that the "government troops guarding them gave them all they needed" though other sources said he was beaten by security guards before being taken into custody. Muhiadin Omar Jimale, another radio journalist, was also stopped and would probably also have been arrested, but he escaped.

29 March -- Five journalists driving to the Bule Burde district of the Central Somalian Hiran Region to cover a story about an object that had reportedly fallen from space were ambushed by armed men. According to the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), the unidentified gunmen opened fire on the vehicle carrying Associated Press stringer Mohammed Sheik Nur, New York Times stringer Mohammed Ibrahim Isak, Radio Jowhar journalist Abshir Ali Gabre, and two freelance journalists. The car was forced to pull over and the gunmen stole six cameras, six mobile phones and some money from the journalists. They also slapped Nur.

8 April -- Abdulkadir Ashir "Nadara", head of the privately-owned TV station Universal TV, journalist Bashir Dirie Nalei and cameraman Hamud Mohammed Osman were arrested during a presidential press conference in Puntland at Mogadishu airport and have been detained since then. During the conference "Nadara" asked Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, who was president of Puntland before his election as Somali President, about alleged favouritism in his choice of officials. An angry presidential spokesman called the question "the language of terrorists" and ordered the arrest of the three journalists. Soldiers carried out the arrests. A few days earlier, on March 28, the Puntland information, telecommunications, culture and tourism ministry banned all unauthorised conferences, lectures and public events about media matters, as well as the creation of media associations, according to the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ). A copy of the order was sent to all government ministries, local and foreign NGOs, UN agencies and the presidential palace.

19 April -- Four shells hit the television studio and the newsroom of Global Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) in Mogadishu. Nobody was wounded but the station was forced off the air. On 21 April, the premises of HornAfrik Radio were hit by seven shells, wounding two of its news

media personnel. The station was temporarily shut down due to ongoing fighting in the neighbourhood. Reporter Yahye Ali Farah was slightly injured and was admitted to Dayniile Hospital, according to HornAfrik journalists, but cameraman Abdi Dhaqane, who also works in the Nairobi bureau of the London-based international news agency Reuters, was seriously wounded. He lost some of the fingers of his right hand and tissue from his right leg, according to Reuters' sources and had to be transferred to Nairobi for treatment. The same day, heavy artillery fire also hit the headquarters of the independent daily ``Ayaamaha'', killing a passer-by. A number of other Mogadishu newspapers, including ``Xog-Ogaal'', one of the capital's leading dailies, have had to cease publishing because of the increased fighting in the city. Meanwhile, Shabelle Media Network has reported that it is unable to properly cover the situation in Mogadishu as so many of its journalists have fled the city with their families. ``The recent warfare is a perfect example of the increasing risks faced by journalists and media outlets in Mogadishu'', said the National Union of Somali Journalists. The Union and its associate organisation, Reporters sans Frontieres, called on the Transitional Federal Government, the Ethiopian forces and all other parties in the conflict, with the support of the international community, to conduct an independent enquiry into these attacks".

Sudan

1 February -- An immediate ban on the prominent Arabic-language Al-Sudani was imposed by a state prosecutor following publication of an article on January 31 of the beheading of Mohammed Taha Mohammed Ahmed, editor-in-chief of the private daily Al-Wifaq, in violation of an official ban on writing about the case. The prosecutor said the paper violated Article 39 of Sudan's provisional constitution and provisions in the 2004 Press and Publication Act regarding harming ``public interests and professional ethics" and ``inciting religious and ethnic hatred". He said he had imposed the ban under Article 130 of the 1991 Code of Criminal Procedure to "prevent any influence on the procedures that are still before the investigative authorities". The paper had reported that the trial of those accused of the murder would begin in a week, that defence lawyers had visited 20 accused in a Khartoum jail but had been prevented from seeing two female defendants in another prison.

7 February -- At midnight a Sudanese security officer visited the home of Adil Sid Ahmed, deputy editor-in-chief of the Arabic-language daily Al-Watan in Khartoum and summoned him for questioning at a nearby security services office where he questioned for several hours by four security officers about an interview Al-Watan published that day with two masked men who paid a surprise visit to the newspaper's office on February 6 and threatened to kill foreigners in Sudan. Ahmed was then arrested and sent to Khartoum's Kober jail. On February 9, another editor at the paper, Ahmed al-Sharif, who was present during the interview, was arrested by security officers in al-Jazirah state in the east-central region of Sudan and taken to Kober jail where he was questioned about the interview and asked if he had any further information about the two masked men. The security officers accused both editors of withholding information about the identity and whereabouts of the Islamic militants, but the editors insisted that they published everything they knew. On February 11, the editors were transferred to the state prosecutor's office and accused of sedition and breaching public peace in terms of the 1991 Criminal Act and the Sudanese Press and Printed Materials Act 2004 regarding violations of editorial and journalistic responsibility. Both editors were released that day and the state prosecutor is now considering whether or not to charge

them. A day later, the National Press Council, Sudan's official press regulator, imposed a two-day suspension on Al-Watan despite the prosecution not having determined that the editors had committed a crime. Al-Watan did not publish its issue the next day but on appeal by the paper's lawyer the court allowed the paper to resume publication on the following day while it considers the National Press Council's ban. The masked men claimed to represent Islamic groups that threatened US and other foreign nationals in Sudan. One of the men stated that they "sent a warning to the US embassy and the UN in Khartoum that we will oppose them militarily and will fight against foreign intervention". The men said they were not Al-Qaeda, but supported that group's goals.

May 17 -- Sudanese government bans Al-Sudani (the Sudanese) independent newspaper indefinitely and arrested its Editor-in-Chief Mahgoub Orwa for two days while the newspaper's journalist Othman Mirghany remains in jail. The action was taken under a highly controversial article of criminal code procedure, over an editorial accusing the Justice Minister of "lying in a money-laundering case". Later Reporters Without Borders (RSF) called for the lifting of the ban.

Togo

1 March -- Veteran radio commentator and media activist Daniel Lawson-Drackey has been banned indefinitely by the Togo government from broadcasting because he gave a commentary on private radio Nana FM critical of a government minister. Drackey, who is president of Maison du Journalisme, an independent journalists' resource centre in the capital Lome, was barred from airing his bi-weekly commentary. The High Authority on Audiovisual Communications (HAAC) said Drackey's radio editorials "gravely harmed the dignity of honest citizens", according to an official letter to Director General Ferdinand Affognon. The ruling came five days after HAAC summoned Affognon over a February 8 broadcast commentary by Drackey which discussed widely-reported allegations of corruption against opposition Public Administration Minister Arthème Ahoomey-Zunu, according to local journalists. Zunu, board chairman of a state agency managing Togolese markets, was alleged to have pocketed CFA fr 620,000 (US \$1,300) for personal expenses, according to local media reports. "The commentary underscored the responsibility of opposition politicians to uphold good governance when they join the government", Drackey said, but HAAC President Philippe Evegno said Drackey aired opinions which were "systematic attacks against honest citizens", though he declined to provide specific examples. Francis Pedro Amuzun, head of the Togolese Media Observatory, a local media regulatory body, said, "HAAC overstepped its authority and this action is illegal under Togolose law because no journalist or broadcaster may be suspended without a court order. The proper procedure would have been for HAAC to issue a statement of concern over content, but it is most troubling that their ruling did not even name any particular commentary in question". Private radio stations and journalists have been the victims of arbitrary suspensions by HAAC recently. In January, private Radio Victoire was pulled off the air for 15 days and its French analyst indefinitely banned from broadcasting in response to critical coverage of the Togolese soccer association.

Tunisia

28 February -- The Tunisian authorities banned issues of two French publications, the daily "Le Monde" and the weekly "Le Nouvel Observateur", and blocked the website of a third, the daily "Liberation", because they contained articles by Tunisian journalist Taoufik Ben Brik critical of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Brik had been silent for three years but has begun to write again. The Tunisian authorities seem determined to ensure that his articles are not seen in the country. Reporters Without Borders said "it must be said that the Ben Ali regime has mastered the art of filtering news and information and preventing the dissemination of any criticism of the president".

2 April -- Managing Editor Omar Mestiri of the banned online newspaper Kalima is facing a prison sentence of between one and three years because he has refused to provide the identity of his sources for a story about an attorney whom he accused of fraud and forgery and because he is alleged to have defamed the attorney. He was summoned by the public prosecutor to answer questions about the alleged defamation offence. The Observatory for the Freedom of Press, Publishing and Creation in Tunisia (OLPEC) has demanded that the case be closed as it believes that Mestiri was only practicing his profession as a journalist. It also called for the repeal of the articles of law that provide for imprisonment for press offences.

9 April -- Al-Jazeera correspondent in Tunisia Lotfi Hajji, who is also president of the Tunisian Union of Journalists, was assaulted by police and banned from covering a major political event in the country, the fifth ban in a month. The latest incident occurred when Hajji arrived at a meeting of the Parti Progressiste Democratique. His entrance into the building was blocked by police in plain clothes who roughed him up.

May 3 -- Journalist Slim Boukhdir was attacked outside his lawyer's office in Tunis by plain clothed police agents who kicked and assaulted him and denounced him as a "traitor" and a "spy". On May 15, Boukhdir was attacked again as he left an Internet cafe by an assailant he had previously seen in the company of the police who are "in charge of watching him". Boukhdir linked these attacks to the articles he wrote about the deaths of seven people in a stampede at a concert in Sfax (270-km south of Tunis) that was part of Lebanese TV's version of the Star Academy song competition. He blamed the deaths on the negligence of the concert's organiser, who is a relative of the President Zine el-Abidine's wife, Lenla Ben Ali.

Zimbabwe

22 March -- The government has issued in the capital Harare a press release threatening foreign correspondents with unspecified government reprisals over alleged biased reporting. Prominent correspondents Jan Raath of the The Times of London and Peta Thornycroft of Britain's Daily Telegraph and US-based broadcaster Voice of America were singled out among foreign media reporters accused of reporting "fabricated stories", according to a statement by the Information and Publicity Ministry. "Should this not stop, government may be forced to act against them", it said.

The threats were linked to news reports alleging that Angolan paramilitary troops would be deployed to bolster the security forces of President Robert Mugabe in response to unrest in the aftermath of a March 11 opposition rally. "The government is also aware of false stories on our arms security, stories which are being concocted by a group of western foreign correspondents mostly reporting for British papers", the statement claimed. In an article published in The Times, "Angola sends Ninja' paramilitaries to bolster Mugabe's security forces", Raath had quoted Home Affairs Minister Kembo Mohadi as confirming the signing of a security cooperation agreement with Angola but the government denied any pending deployment. Zimbabwe's government has been hostile to many Western media outlets, registering only a few to operate inside the country, according to international news reports. It is not the first time the two journalists have been targeted by the government over their reporting. In February 2005, Raath left the country following official harassment. In 2002, Thornycroft was detained for 72 hours on suspicion of violating Zimbabwe's harsh press laws.

31 March -- Suspicions that a retired Zimbabwean TV cameraman was murdered because he sold to foreign media organisations TV footage of the political unrest in Harare last month and, in particular the pictures showing the injuries suffered by opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Morgan Tsvangirai, have surfaced in Harare. Police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena said the body of Edward Chikombo, a former cameraman at the government-run Zimbabwe television, the country's sole TV station, was found dumped in the Darwindale district, about 30-km (20 miles) northwest of his home in the Harare township of Glen View. He had been missing since March 29. There were indications Chikombo, a father of four, was assaulted and died from injuries, state radio quoted Bvudzijena as saying. No further details were given. There has been no confirmation of the reports that Chikomba, who left the state broadcaster in 2002, had sold the footage. Police have opened a murder investigation into his death. Meanwhile, lawyers acting for another reporter, Gift Phiri, 30, arrested under sweeping media laws said he was assaulted and tortured in custody. Phiri, freed on bail on April 5 after nearly a week in custody, suffered a broken finger and other injuries in police assaults and "torture", his lawyer Rangu Nyamurundu, said. Phiri was hospitalised for further medical examination after his release. He was charged under the media laws for allegedly writing "falsehoods" and working as a journalist for the British-based newspaper The Zimbabwean and an online news service run by Zimbabwean exiles without a government licence -- offences which carry a penalty of a fine or up to two years imprisonment. The Zimbabwean newspaper says Phiri applied for a press card and was still waiting for a response from the state-appointed Media and Information Commission. Phiri is scheduled to go to trial on April 25. The alleged "falsehoods", according to the state-owned Herald, were reports in the Zimbabwean that army generals had demanded that President Robert Mugabe step down to make way for a military-led government and about an alleged ruling party "terror squad" linked to the torture of labour leaders and opposition activists. The government has denied the reports.

Peripheral cases

This is a list of peripheral cases which do not quite fall into the category of 'insult' law or criminal defamation but which add a further perspective to the problems facing journalists. In addition various statements and appeals relating to press freedom are included.

Egypt

17 April 2007 -- Reporters San Frontieres (RSF) called for the release of blogger Abdul-Moneim Mahmud, 27, a reporter for Al-Hiwar television station and the administrator of the popular blog Ana Ikhwan, who was arrested on 14 April 2007 at Cairo airport and charged with membership of an "illegal organisation" (the Muslim Brotherhood), but, according to RSF, his arrest seems to be linked to the photos and reports about the torture of detainees that he posted online.

5 April -- Following the initiation of an "insult" and defamation action against Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (HRinfo) Executive Director Gamal Eid and bloggers Manal Hassan and Alaa Seif by a Judge Abdel Fattah Mourad, which resulted in the three being detained and harassed, HRinfo announced that it will not be terrorised into giving up its right to sue the judge for violating HRinfo's copyrights. After the prosecutor finished questioning the three and ordered their release on their own recognizance, the police continued to detain them for more than 10 hours on the pretext of finishing procedures.

Human Rights Watch called on the Egyptian Interior Ministry to investigate the torture and rape of a pro-democracy activist and blogger Muhammad al-Sharqawi while in police custody last year and protect him from police intimidation.

Ivory Coast

5 May -- Men in military uniforms and armed with AK47 rifles and pistols broke into the offices of the pro-government daily "Le Matin" and made off with cash, various documents and some of the paper's equipment including a television set, four cameras and several dictaphones altogether worth CFA fr 3.5-million (US \$7,270). The offices' security guard was locked in a washroom during the robbery.

Liberia

8 May -- The management of the "Liberian Express" bi-weekly newspaper has been threatened with a US \$20,000 libel action by a ruling Unity Party member of the House of Representatives of Liberia, Dusty Wolokollie, who accused the newspaper of publishing "a falsehood against him". The newspaper had linked him to a meeting allegedly held in London to make an oil deal with the

management of the Broadway Consolidated company, a UK-based mineral company which entered into an off-shore concession agreement with the Government of Liberia. Wolokollie says he will not request a retraction or complain to the Press Union of Liberia; instead he intends ``to teach the Liberian media a lesson".

Morocco

16 April -- A delegation from the Committee to Protect Journalists voiced concern about a troubling pattern of punitive judicial sanctions that have threatened Morocco's independent press. Over the last two years, Moroccan courts have levied stiff criminal penalties and civil damages against independent news publications, effectively banishing two of the country's most outspoken journalists from their profession, pressuring a third to quit journalism, and sending a strong message to independent-minded journalists who report on sensitive political issues in the kingdom. Moroccan officials and members of the press are also discussing amendments to the country's press law that would keep in place tough criminal penalties and possibly open the door to new restrictions on the news media. Delegation leader Joel Campagna, CPJ's senior programme coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, said, ``It's clear to us that authorities are putting economic pressure on critical newspapers by exacting exorbitant civil damages in the courts". These cases have, in some instances, prompted news outlets to soften coverage. Many of the recent press prosecutions underscore the restrictions imposed by Morocco's 2002 press law, which lays out a variety of potential penalties. A draft press law now under discussion among publishers, journalists and the government would keep several criminal penalties in place for journalists deemed to have violated vaguely worded bans against offending the monarchy, Islam, and state institutions such as the army and judiciary. Offenders would face the prospect of jail and heavy fines for violating the content bans, which also include critical coverage of the country's sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Namibia

25 April -- ``The Namibian" newspaper's editor Gwen Lister and The Free Press of Namibia, the company that owns and publishes the newspaper, received a demand for N\$7-million (US \$1-m) damages from the Palazzolo family, or face five defamation suits. The plaintiffs claim that four members of the Palazzolo, alias Von Palace-Kolbatschenko, family were defamed in a story in ``The Namibian" on March 23 and the free weekly newspaper, ``Informante", under the headline ``Mafia linked to Namibian gems".

Nigeria

3 May -- Several media organisations have condemned the veto exercised by President Olusegun Obasanjo over freedom of expression by his refusal to give his assent to the Freedom of Information Bill (FOIB) as passed by the National Assembly. They have also condemned the armed invasion of the Abuja premises of the African Independent Television (AIT), numerous

cases of assault and attacks on journalists during the recently concluded general elections, the harassment of journalists during the recent May 1st Workers' Day celebrations, and especially the assault on Mr Dare Folorunso, a cameraman with Ondo State Radiovision Corporation in Akure, Ondo State capital, by a police officer, and the arrest and detention of human rights, pro-democracy, socialist and trade union activists as well as the seizure of their newsletters and books, during the Workers' day celebration. The Media for Democracy (MFD) in Nigeria, comprising Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Independent Journalism Center (IJC), Journalists for Democratic Rights (JODER) and International Press Centre (IPC) have declared their strong condemnation of President Olusegun Obasanjo refused to sign the FOIB despite the established fact that no meaningful war can be waged against corruption where the citizens are denied the right of access to information. The MFD also urged the National Assembly without further delay to override the President's veto, as constitutionally permitted, so that the Freedom of Information Law could come into existence immediately; calls on all assaulted journalists and media establishments as well as detained activists to urgently institute legal action against the security personnel and agencies responsible for the unwelcome and barbaric violation of their fundamental rights; and charges journalists in the country to continue to strive towards higher professional and ethical standards in the course of their day-to-day reportorial duties and the fulfillment of their constitutional obligation to monitor governance and hold the government accountable to the people. It also calls on the government to tackle press freedom violations given the ``arrests, beatings, intimidation and threats which are their daily lot, whoever is president. With the murders of two journalists in 2006 still unpunished, it is high time the government seriously tackled the problem of press freedom violations".

Somalia

Reporters Without Borders commends the Somalia media organisations on the holding of a three-day conference on Media Development Policy held in Baidoa from 18 to 20 March. Reporters Without Borders commends the NUSOJ for organising the conference jointly with the information ministry. More than 50 representatives from the government, parliament, human rights groups and media organisations took part, discussing such issues as how to protect free speech and the safety of journalists, how to regulate the media and ensure their independence and the creation of public media. It is noted particularly that Information Minister Madobe Nunow Mohammed said the government ``accepts all the recommendations that emerged from the conference and will use them as the basis for media legislation". An 11-member team was set up to monitor implementation of the decisions. The NUSOJ told Reporters Without Borders it was a major step forward for the media in Somalia.

Sudan

14 May -- The International Press Institute (IPI) membership adopted a resolution calling on the government of Sudan to grant all journalists full access to the Darfur region and to halt its repression of local media and journalists. Over the last 14 months, the security services have reviewed the contents of local newspapers before publication and some newspapers have been banned. In the same period, local and foreign journalists have been arrested and others intimidated

or beaten by the security services. The need for special permits from the security services and a requirement to produce photocopies of travel permits at Interior Ministry offices to travel in Sudan has also created bureaucratic barriers. The government also has an informal "blacklist" of foreign journalists who manage to evade these obstacles and who produce critical reports. Foreign journalists have sought to enter Sudan through Chad without visas. As a consequence, foreign journalists have been arrested and charged with espionage and false reporting.

Uganda

13 March -- The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) backed a call by the Ugandan Journalists Association (UJA) for the government to protect media covering court cases against opposition groups and to put an end to police harassment of journalists. In a meeting with Minister of Information Alhaji Kirunda Kivejinja on 9 March, the UJA Executive Committee called for an end to continued police brutality against journalists who have been harassed while covering court proceedings and demonstrations by the opposition politicians and other groups with divergent views from the government. "The current harassment of the journalists during the trial of rebel Peoples' Redemption Army (PRA) suspects has made covering it a nightmare for journalists", said UJA President Ahmed Kateregga. In early March, New Vision newspaper journalist Chris Ahimbisibwe was roughed up at Bushenyi High Court and detained by police. In another case, New Vision photographer Richard Semakula was roughed up at Kampala High Court and his camera destroyed by the police. At the March 9 meeting, journalists threatened to boycott government events if the safety of journalists could not be guaranteed. After the meeting, Minister Kivejinja called on police to stop harassing and intimidating journalists. The journalists presented a petition to the Minister opposing the 1995 Press and Journalist Statute Bill that provides for registration and licensing of journalists by the Statutory Media Council instead of the self-regulatory organisation, the Independent Media Council of Uganda (IMCU).

22 February -- Members of Parliament (MPs) in Uganda have called on the government to allow the private broadcaster, Nation Television (NTV), to resume its broadcasts after state regulators shut the channel down 19 days ago allegedly because some transmission equipment did not conform to technical standards. The MPs allege that the excuse of technical incompatibility was false and disguised an attempt to shut down the broadcaster. NTV was shut down on 2 February for the second time in a week and barely two days after it had resumed operations. The Broadcasting Council (BC), state-run media regulatory body, said the station's equipment was overloading a mast where NTV and other broadcasters rent space. Two NTV microwave receivers were confiscated. The BC argued that the mast owned by the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) was in danger of falling. NTV is a part of the network of the Nairobi-based Nation Media Group and was launched in December 2006 in Uganda.

Zimbabwe

21 May -- IPI Board announced that Ethiopia and Zimbabwe would be retained on its Watch List -- reserved for countries with an especially bad record of press violations. IPI said that while it welcomed the release of imprisoned journalists in Ethiopia, a number still remain in detention. It hoped the Ethiopian authorities would immediately release these journalists and refrain from introducing a press law that contains clauses undermining freedom of the press. The situation in Zimbabwe has become increasingly desperate and there is little or no private media in the country. Most of the journalism profession has succumbed to an array of deeply repressive laws and violence and intimidation.

Sources: Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Journaliste en Danger (JED), Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (HRinfo), Center For Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP), International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), ARTICLE 19, Index on Censorship, and local correspondents and newspapers.

The present report was prepared by Raymond Louw, Editor and Publisher of the current affairs weekly newsletter, *Southern Africa Report*. Mr Louw is also the chairperson of the Media Freedom Committee of the South African National Editors' Forum and Africa Representative of the World Press Freedom Committee.