

## **FAJ, IFJ outline strategies to defend journalists' rights**

Leaders of the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ), the African regional organisation of the International Federation of Journalists, strongly condemned at their biannual meeting in Djibouti on 23 June 2009, the unsafe and precarious working conditions of journalists in Africa.



During the meeting, hosted by the Eastern Africa Journalists Association (EAJA) and supported by the American Centre for International Labour Support (Solidarity Centre), the FAJ leadership body was joined leaders of the sub-regional groups of journalists' trade unions in Central Africa, Southern Africa, Northern Africa, West Africa and Eastern Africa to discuss the protection, monitoring and promotion of the rights of African journalists.

The final declaration highlighted the increased impunity faced by journalists at the hands of the enemies of free press and the flagrant disregard for international labour conventions by media employers, some refusing to provide their workers with a living wage and others to ensure equal pay for equal work for their women employees.

The FAJ leaders raised strong concerns about the current major crisis affecting media and journalists, in several parts of Africa.

They strongly protested the “unwarranted attacks, arrest and detention of media personnel in the Gambia, and the continued harassment and persecution of journalists by the government of President Yahya Jammeh that has distinguished itself as an enemy of free press” and demanded that all the charges levied recently against seven Gambian journalists are dropped.

“We are extremely concerned that the Gambian government had chosen again to target top trade union leaders in the Gambia Press Union and media professionals for simply exercising their legitimate trade union activities and journalistic work. This targeted crackdown is a barefaced violation of the Gambia's international legal obligations to respect freedom of expression and freedom of association,” said Omar Faruk Osman, FAJ President.

The FAJ leaders also strongly condemned the brutalities and violence against Somali journalists. In the final declaration, they stated “we are very disturbed by the continued killing, kidnapping, arrests, threats, disappearances and intimidation of journalists and other media workers in Somalia.” They further called up the African Union, the United Nations and relevant international organisations to move with speed and restore order in Somalia and to ensure the safety and security of journalists in Somalia.

The recent arrest and detention of editors and journalists from the independent media in Zimbabwe were also deplored as well as the incessant and scandalous violations of the labour code in the Cameroon's media industry, which led this year, to the dismissal of an employees' representative at a daily newspaper, and the subsequent refusal by private media houses to allow their journalists to organise elections to choose

their representatives this year.

The FAJ leaders reaffirmed their commitment to attempt to achieve gender equity in the media in the continent, by fighting to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women. They agreed the urgent setting up of a Pan-African gender body.

Finally the FAJ leaders expressed their concern about the current internal crisis, which is consuming the National Union of Journalists of Tunisia (SNJT) and the reported interference by outside forces in the affairs and activities of this union. The statement called on journalists' communities all over the world to support Tunisian journalists in their efforts to defend and preserve the independence of their union and respect for its constitution by all sides”.

At the close of their meeting, the African leaders paid a courtesy visit on 25 June to the President of the Republic of Djibouti, Ismail Omar Guelleh, who reaffirmed his commitment to a free and independent media in Africa. In stressing the importance of quality journalism, he added, “I will be your defender, advocate and friend in the campaign for the fight for press freedom on the continent.”

In their final declaration, the leaders asked that any sustained advocacy campaign should address the case of 15 journalists believed to be still detained in a secret prison in Eritrea. They asked for direct intervention by the Africa Union, the UN agencies and other relevant international organisations and stressed the need for better working conditions for journalists and media freedom in Eritrea.

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