

## Africa's media freedom on knife-edge

From Cape to Cairo, from Morocco to South Africa and from the east to the west, independent journalists and editors are crying foul, singing a song of redemption, death and distress as African governments - most of them 'brutal', 'cruel' and 'corrupt' - flex their muscles to stifle free reporting and put fear in newsrooms.

 [Bylssa Sikiti da Silva](#) 27 Jul 2010

Even in SA, long considered as a media paradise, things are looking pretty bad as journalists may soon face the wrath of a media tribunal proposed by the ANC.

Every single day is a challenge of survival for African media practitioners as they face all sorts of threats and attacks from politicians, partial judges, corrupt business people, ruling parties and security forces.

### Threatened with death

In Swaziland, journalists are threatened with death by a member of the royal family, while SA-based journalists face up to 25 years if they violate the soon-to-be-enacted Protection of Information Bill.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, reporters get daily death threats and some end up assassinated by hitmen, while in Ghana journalists continue to be unnecessarily prosecuted under the country's 1960 archaic law.

There are many incidents that cannot be all cited here, and critics are worried that the increase of such incidents could reverse a few rare gains of democracy and good governance in the past decade.

### Rise in violations

African media analyst and author Denis Kayenge Kinkufi told Bizcommunity.com yesterday that the rise in incidents of media freedom violation in Africa is a worrying trend.

"In my view, these people have something to hide and the only reason they are reinforcing their strategies to hide their macabre agenda in order to mislead the population," he said, labelling SA's Protection of Information Bill a 'stupid' legislation that should not be allowed to be enacted at all costs.

"But this is not going to work, it is too late for them to do this," he said, urging all media organisations and human rights bodies in Africa to rally behind the beleaguered journalists.

### Shaming the profession

However, he slammed editors and journalists who have hidden agendas - like promoting political parties and regimes through sunshine journalism in exchange for cash, luxury gifts and party membership.

Speaking in French, he said: "That really weakens and shames the media profession, and sows division between the ruling parties and opposition forces, as one party could be accusing the other of teaming with the media to destroy it."

Early this month, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and some African media groups, which included SA's Pansy Tlakula, African Union's special rapporteur on freedom of expression, called on heads of state of Francophone Africa nations to publicly commit to a free, vibrant, and self-sustaining press.

## **SA's Protection of Information Bill**

Meanwhile, the International Press Institute (IPI) has vehemently criticised SA's Protection of Information Bill, saying it sets a very low threshold for classification and imposes draconian penalties for those who reveal classified information, without providing for a public interest defence.

"This bill should explicitly take into account journalists acting in the public interest, and I am concerned that turned into law, it will permit the concealment of a vast range of information that is in the public interest, which at the same time leading to the erosion of investigative journalism," IPI director David Dudge was quoted as saying by the organisation's website.

"Public officials can too easily hide information, without significant oversight from an independent body," Dudge said.

## **ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA**

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer. [View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>