

WAN-IFRA calls for press freedom in Africa

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) has called on African nations to immediately abolish criminal defamation and "insult" laws that are widely used to silence criticism and intimidate free reporting across the continent.



"The repeal of insult and criminal defamation laws is crucial for the advancement of press freedom across Africa, and is necessary to allow the press to carry out its work as the guarantor of public accountability without fear of imprisonment or reprisal," said a resolution from the board of WAN-IFRA, meeting in Hamburg, Germany.

In a separate resolution, the board called on South African President Jacob Zuma and the African National Congress party to withdraw recent proposals that could severely restrict freedom of the press in a country that is a leader among African states in freedom of expression.

WAN-IFRA issued three other resolutions to:

- Call on the Iranian government to immediately release all imprisoned journalists and writers and cease the repression of free expression and press freedom in the country ([Read the full resolution](#)).
- Urge the government of Bahrain to take all necessary steps to reverse the ongoing crackdown against freedom of expression ([Read the resolution](#)).
- Call on Argentine President Cristina Kirchner to ensure that the government reverse recent actions that undermine the free and independent press in Argentina (<http://www.wan-press.org/article18641.html> [Read the resolution](#)).

In the resolution condemning criminal defamation and insult laws, WAN-IFRA said their elimination was needed to allow the press to fulfill its role "safeguarding accountable and effective democratic governance across the continent." [Read the full resolution](#).

Ghana is the only African country to have fully repealed insult and criminal defamation, with a handful of others having partially decriminalised the laws. In an effort to end such laws and restrictions to a free and independent African Press, WAN-IFRA and the World Editors Forum issued the Declaration of Table Mountain (<http://www.declarationoftablemountain.org>) in 2007, calling on African leaders to adopt its principles.

Resolution concerning SA

Criminal law is an inappropriate means of dealing with the issue of defamation; a civil award of reasonable damages is adequate and appropriate relief in all proven cases of defamation.

In the resolution concerning South Africa, WAN-IFRA called on President Zuma to withdraw the Protection of Information Bill, which would allow officials to classify documents as "confidential" on vaguely defined grounds and could be used to outlaw coverage of such issues as law enforcement and judicial matters. The WAN-IFRA Board also called for the withdrawal of an ANC proposal to create a government-appointed Media Appeals Tribunal to rule on complaints against the press. [Read the full resolution.](#)

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