
Ninth Highway Africa 2005 conference is near

Newsflash

The ninth Highway Africa conference is set to take place in Grahamstown, South Africa, from the 12th until the 14th of September. Highway Africa concentrates on new media issues relevant to journalists and encompasses the policy, economics, development and technology questions around ICTs. This year's theme is 'Reinforcing journalism in the information society'.



Check the next issue of MediaNews to see who has won one of the 'Awards for the Innovative use of New Media in Africa'.

For more information on the conference:
www.highwayafrica.ru.ac.za/mission.cfm

Dialogue improves safety of journalists in DRC

Interview

Positive steps towards more freedom for journalists are being made in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with the leading defender of media freedom, Journalistes en Danger (JED, Journalists in Danger) organising round table workshops, resulting in a safer environment for journalists.

The situation in the DRC is far from perfect for journalists and advocates of media freedom. Speaking from London, Donat M'Baya Tshimanga, director of JED, explains that he was forced to leave the DRC due to serious death threats. "I had to take responsibility [and leave] and not offer myself to the Holocaust of the enemies of democracy in my country."

Since its formation in 1998, JED has been fighting for media freedom. One of the obstacles JED is facing, is the silencing of journalists through imprisonment. "We noticed

that whoever holds any sort of power - be it political, economic or military - can have a journalist arrested," says M'Baya Tshimanga. "Journalists who write about abuse of power and corruption suffer from criminal prosecution."

First meeting

When human rights minister Ntumba Luaba heard complaints from JED about this abuse of power two years ago, he organised a meeting in Kinshasa. Journalists, magistrates, police officers and security services officials gathered to discuss how they could effectively perform their duties without infringing on each other. "That meeting was fiery in the beginning, but in the end we managed to create an atmosphere of understanding."

For the first time JED could speak about the need to abandon unjust criminal prosecution of the press. And although the consultation structure that was achieved during this meeting was never able to function (due to minister Luaba leaving government), progress was made. "A climate was created which was more relaxed and reduced arrests and false questioning of journalists in Kinshasa."

Following the groundbreaking conference, JED's regional correspondents expressed a desire for similar meetings. This idea was supported by NiZA, and thus JED included it in its 2004 program.



The round table workshops, which drew about 105 journalists, human rights activists, magistrates, police officers and security services officers, were scheduled in the towns of Kananga and Kisangani in November 2004 and in Bukavu in May 2005. M'Baya Tshimanga adds: "And with regard to the socio-political evolution in the DRC, we invited the media commission HAM (Haute Autorité des Médias) and the electoral

commission CEI (Commission Electorale Indépendante).”

Heated debates

In the first phase of the workshops, dialogue was created. Different roles were discussed and complaints were raised. “Then we proceeded to analyse the vision each group had on elections and its role in the electoral process. After frequently heated debates, the participants managed to gather recommendations and create a code of conduct that enables each one of them to carry out their job, which is essential in a democracy.”

This code reaffirms freedom of expression and opinion for all citizens - including journalists. It also stresses the importance of guaranteeing law and order, and security. “Journalists admit that the freedom of the press in a democracy is not an absolute freedom, it can, for example, be subject to the right to privacy.”

According to M’Baya Tshimanga the biggest achievement remains the start of an informal consultation structure to solve questions, instead of going back to systematically applying force and the imprisonment of journalists. “It is clear that there is still a lot to do, but in general the situation is getting better.”

But M’Baya Tshimanga doesn’t stop worrying. “My biggest fear is that politicians can brainwash everybody: the army, the security service, the judiciary and even journalists. The media is being invaded by political figures who either set up their own media companies or take over already running businesses.”

At the time of this newsletter’s publication, M’Baya Tshimanga will be back in the DRC, bravely advocating press freedom in an evolving democracy, despite the threats on his life.

Visit JED’s website for more information:
<http://www.jed-congo.org>

By Ellen Hollemans

(e_m_hollemans@hotmail.com) is a freelance journalist from Amsterdam who has worked for the Mail & Guardian Online in Johannesburg through NiZa’s program for young professionals. (For more information about this program, read the article ‘Dutch journalists experience Africa’ in this newsletter).

Street newspapers enjoy soccer tournament

News

From selling publications on the streets to becoming instant soccer heroes. Vendors of the street magazines *The Big Issue Namibia* and *The Big Issue South Africa* flew to Edinburgh, Scotland, to participate in the third Homeless World Cup soccer tournament.

In the games, organised by the International Network of Streetpapers, homeless and other socially marginalised vendors/soccer players squared off in a tournament of street soccer —



The Big Issue South Africa

soccer played on a smaller field made of concrete. Out of the 27 participating countries, Italy triumphed for the second time in a row, beating Poland 3-2 in the final. The Big Issue

Namibia ranked 14th in the tournament, while The Big Issue South Africa was not far

behind and came 18th, after nearly winning the City of Edinburgh Trophy, which was claimed by Wales.