

TANZANIA

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World Press Freedom Day 2015

May 2015

MEDIA STAKEHOLDERS OF TANZANIA PROTEST AGAINST THE NEW MEDIA LAWS

From the 2nd to the 3rd of May, about 250 journalists and media stakeholders seized the World Press Freedom Day in Morogoro as an opportunity to take a stand against the increasing restrictions on the freedom of opinion and expression as well as the press freedom in Tanzania. The event, which in this year was co-organized by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), addressed the topic 'Media Safety in the Digital Age: Better Reporting, Gender Equality & Privacy'. In the context of the restrictive media acts that were recently passed by the National Assembly, the event gained much importance as well as attention.

In 2015 the World Press Freedom Day has been used for the third time as a forum for associations, institutions and top representatives from the media sector in Tanzania to critically reflect on the developments of the freedom of opinion and expression and the press freedom. The initiative was born in 1994 by the UN and is commemorated annually on the 3rd of May in over 100 countries of the world under one agreed theme. The objective of the event is to bring to attention the role of freedom of reporting for democracy and development as well as to honor journalists, whose freedom or even lives have been put on stake when carrying out their profession.

Gender Equality, Better Reporting and Media Safety in the Digital Age

The two days event began with presentations and discussions on the three sub-themes of this year's World Press Freedom Day. The first sub-theme was on the issue of representation and chances of women in

the media sector. According to the presentation by Valerie Msoka, the Chairperson of the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA), Tanzanian women are to date clearly under-represented in the media sector. This holds particular true for the leadership positions of the sector like the one of the Chief Editor or media owner. She, therefore, appealed to the participants, to increase the support for the career advancement of young female journalists.

The second sub-theme 'Better Reporting in the Digital Age' was addressed by the journalist Kabendera in his presentation. On the one hand, he pointed out new opportunities, which the internet offers due to a huge well of various information sources and innovative ways of publication in the form of internet fora and blogs. On the other hand, he, with regard to the quality of journalistic texts, pointed out the challenges, which arise in relation to the internet. The internet induces the use of data, which has not been adequately verified and also induces a rush publication of articles in the net. Various participants, who demanded qualitatively better and more responsible reporting through the internet, were sharing that opinion.

The last sub-theme dealt with the issue of security of private digital data of journalists. The theme was well argued by Maxence Meilo, the young founder and manager of Jamii Forum, one of the most popular online platforms in Tanzania. He emphasized how important it was, particularly for journalists, to adequately secure their own data. He found widespread support in the audience when he said that most Tanzanians were not sufficiently informed about internet security

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and therefore seminars dealing with those aspects were necessary and urgently to be conducted.



Maxence Melo outlines issues on digital safety.

Source: Sunday Shomari

However, Melo spots a threat to security of private digital data of Tanzanians not only in the lack of awareness about internet safety among the users. He voiced sharp criticism on the new cybercrime law, which will allow the Government extensive access to the digital data of its citizens. Melo emphasized that without question it was the duty and responsibility of the Government to protect internet users in the country against cybercrimes. However, the new laws would not lead to more security but quite the contrary increase insecurity as they de facto allow the entire electronic communication of citizens to be kept under surveillance without major limitation. According to the Cybercrimes Act, a person can even get imprisoned for dissemination of 'false, deceptive, misleading or inaccurate' information, independent as to whether that information was sent by him-/herself or he/she just received it – possibly even without any consent. Melo noted that this formulation gives room for arbitrary measure of the Government against Government critics, opposition and independent journalists, and demands for vehement protesting against that law. Also, Melo reported that he himself has been invited several times by state security personnel in order to reveal information about the identity of users of the Jamii Forum, who publish and discuss information criticizing the Government in that popular online platform.

Threats to the Freedom of Press in Tanzania

A critical discussion about the new laws regarding the media sector (Statistics Act, Cybercrimes Act, Access to Information Act & Media Services Act) continued on the following day. It was criticized that investigative journalism is made almost impossible to practice due to the limitations set during investigation and publication. According to the unanimous opinion of the participants, the extremely high fine and jail sentences in particular, which will be considered by publication of actual or supposedly 'false' information, are a big interference to press freedom.

Since at the time when the meeting was being held the Cybercrimes Act and the Statistics Act were yet to be signed into law by the President, the participants resolved to do what was possible to prevent President Kikwete signing them. Besides using their information platforms in order to raise public concern with regard to the dangers of the new laws in respect to the freedom of expression and of the press, they planned to send a delegation of interested representatives to personally meet President Kikwete.



Absalom Kibanda calls for action against the new media laws.

Source: Sunday Shomari

The Chairperson of the Tanzania Editors Forum (TEF), Absalom Kibanda, requested, in addition, the participation of representatives from the European Union and from the United Nations, who participated as Guests of Honor, to use their influence to prevent having those laws in their current form. In their speeches, both the EU-Ambassador Filiberto Sebregondi as well as the Head of the UN in Tanzania, Alvaro Rodriguez,

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pleaded for observing and strengthening the freedom of expression and that of the press. Sebregondi referred to numerous programmes of the EU that support a free media sector in Tanzania, and for example include providing support to threatened journalists. He pointed out that the EU not only supports public events addressing the freedom of expression and of the press but also holds internal dialogues with the Tanzanian Government on the topics. Tanzania had made a lot of progress in those issues during the past years, but was now partly being questioned. The EU-Diplomat indicated that even in Europe preserving and strengthening press freedom remain to be a continuous task.



High Table f.i.t.r.: Jane Mihanji (UTPC), Ernest Sungura (TMF), Filiberto Sebregondi (EU), Alvaro Rodriguez (UNDP), Simon Berege (MISA) & Edda Sanga (SJMC)

During further discussions the new laws were found not to be the only threat to press freedom in Tanzania. A number of examples of threats, hostility and physical violence from the police were mentioned as being part of the daily encounters of a journalist in Tanzania. The participants were of the opinion that the frequency of such incidences was steadily increasing. Nevertheless, representatives of the journalist association urged that they should not be intimidated but should continue with their responsibilities of providing reliable reports and enlightenment even under these onerous conditions.

A further threat to qualitative reporting in Tanzania was mentioned to be widespread corruption, which brings about one-sided political coverage. This criticism, however, was not only directed towards journalists themselves, who often publish an article by

order and after receiving an appropriate honorarium. Also, media owners as well as chief editors are considered to be responsible, because they are accountable for bad working conditions, which make journalists susceptible to corrupt practices that are against the principles of independent journalism. According to Jane Mihanji, a member of the Union of Tanzania Press Clubs (UTPC), eighty percent (80%) of the Tanzanian journalists have no employment contracts and they do receive only irregularly a most often low wage.

All in all, the World Press Freedom Day was a central platform to address the challenges the media in Tanzania is facing. The gathering of numerous media representatives was used to constructively discuss their situation and to take a stand against the imminent restrictions of the freedom of expression and that of press in the country. In the light of recent developments responsible reporting can be considered to get more and more difficult in Tanzania.



*Group photo with guests of honour and organisers
Source: Warioba Igombe*

By participating in this event KAS expresses its solidarity with and support of journalists, acknowledging that media plays a key role in a democracy and that free reporting promotes the establishment of an informed and independent civil society.



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Impressum

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