

MEDIA SOLIDARITY IN FACE OF MISFORTUNE



International
Federation
of Journalists



After the Tsunami: Humanitarian crisis gives way to a new beginning for Aceh Journalism

ALMOST ONE YEAR AFTER THE TSUNAMI DISASTER, THE IFJ WENT BACK TO INDONESIA TO SEE HOW THE EMERGENCY CASH SUPPORT – WORTH CLOSE TO 100,000 EURO – RAISED FROM JOURNALISTS AROUND THE WORLD IN THE DAYS AFTER THE DISASTER HAD BEEN USED AND TO EXAMINE HOW TO SPEND FRESH FUNDING WHICH HAD ACCUMULATED DURING THE YEAR.

BY JOHN MITCHELL

The visit, in November 2005, examined with the IFJ's affiliate the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) how money, raised by IFJ members worldwide, should be spent on media projects to assist in re-building the lives of journalists in Aceh, main region of Indonesia caught up in the Tsunami disaster.

Altogether 89 journalists and media staff died in the disaster in Aceh Province, with 78 journalists and media staff still missing and presumed dead. Within 20 days of the tragedy, the IFJ transferred more than 31,800 Euros as humanitarian relief from its safety fund appeal. Other funds were transferred directly from IFJ unions. All of this was distributed to the dependents of the victims. Donations were also sent to journalists' groups in Sri Lanka who were also affected by the disaster, with two journalists still missing presumed dead.

Many who survived lost everything. Some lost their livelihoods. 80% of the money was distributed to members' families. 20% went to non-members. Eddy Suprpto, AJI General Secretary, said that the government has not supported the victims. Most aid has come from overseas and solidarity from IFJ unions was particularly important.

Rebuilding

The AJI sees a new beginning for journalism in the region by encouraging young journalists. It has already launched a school for journalists, which gives additional training to working journalists and attempts to raise standards. This has enough funding to continue until the end of 2005. The union is concerned that following the massive international sympathy and support in the aftermath of the Tsunami aid money is being siphoned off. Eddy Suprpto says AJI is encouraging journalists to try to expose this corruption.

AJI want the major part of the money left in the IFJ appeal to be dedicated to continuing the work of the journalism school.

Investigative journalists at these schools are funded for a month to carry out their research and are expected to have an outlet that will publish their work. The union also publishes a book of this work, which is distributed to libraries and other outlets.

It is felt that it will take at least three to four years to recover from the tsunami disaster and AJI would like to run three courses per year during this period and beyond. This alone would use up more than the current aid money available. (A total of about 101,520 Euro.)

In addition, the union has set up Media Center Aceh – AJI which is committed to supporting journalists covering Aceh, giving priority “to improve the capacity of journalists to play the social role in the society through their journalism.” It also gives practical help and the centre provides computers and 24 hour Internet connection; digital cameras, on loan; rooms for work and discussion; and access to satellite telephones.

In the post-Tsunami months key questions surrounding government corruption and the ability of the authorities to tolerate a more critical press or, for that matter, the willingness of media owners to allow their journalists to write freely, continue to hang over the media in Aceh.

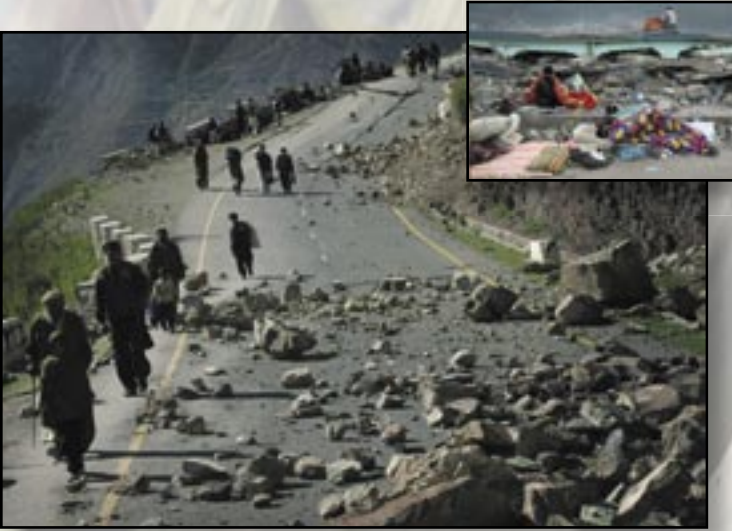
There is pressure from many quarters to stifle press freedom. The union has reports of journalists being intimidated and attacked for reporting unfavourable news and there have been moves to repeal the press freedom laws.

In these circumstances work to reinforce journalistic freedoms and professional values is vital. And small organisations, like AJI, are more suited to getting things done. For this reason alone, the odds are in AJI's favour of having an impact. They should be helped and encouraged both locally and by the international community.

John Mitchell visited Indonesia at the request of the IFJ to report on the IFJ solidarity effort. His detailed recommendations concerning further support for AJI members in Aceh is now being considered by the IFJ Executive Committee.



Disaster in the foothills of the Himalayas and a sinister air crash add to tragedy of 2005



AS THE TSUNAMI THAT SWEEPED AWAY TENS OF THOUSANDS OF LIVES AROUND THE INDIAN OCEAN IN THE DYING DAYS OF 2004 SPILLED OVER INTO 2005 IT WAS CLEAR THAT MEDIA WORKERS – UP TO 100 OF THEM – WERE AMONG THE VICTIMS.

And as the year progressed the hand of misfortune reached further afield with an earthquake disaster in Pakistan, a horrifying air crash in Iran and a tragic road accident in the African state of Guinea claiming dozens of more media victims.

In October, the IFJ and the global journalist community witnessed the devastation of another Asian earthquake which saw the tragic deaths of three journalists with another 11 injured, over 40,000 people killed and at least two million people were left homeless and stranded.

According to reports from the the IFJ's local affiliate, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), up to 50 journalists lost relatives or their homes. "This was a dark moment for journalism in Pakistan and we have the deepest sympathy for all of those affected by the disaster," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "Our members will continue to do everything they can to help."

As a direct response, the IFJ set up a special disaster relief fund, partly with funds donated in memory of former IFJ Senior Vice President Gustl Glattfelder, to help the victims.

Less than two months later, on World Aids Day, in another tragic turn of fate this time on the African continent, the IFJ International Safety Fund came to the assistance of fifteen journalists from six media institutions involved in a massive road accident, as they were covering events in the Guinea Bissau region of Gabu, some 200 kilometers from the capital Bissau. The tyre of the mini-van in which they were travelling burst and the van somersaulted. Two jour-

nalists, Sori Baldé working for Televisão da Guiné-Bissau (TGB) and Aruna Djamanca from the newspaper Kansaré died on the spot.

"This was news of yet another tragedy for journalism" said Gabriel Baglo, IFJ Africa Regional Director, "which saw the disastrous death of two of our colleagues". Through the IFJ International Safety Fund, the IFJ Africa Office continues to provide support for their injured colleagues.

The year closed with one of the darkest moments for journalism when on December 6 in Iran 48 journalists and media staff were among the 94 passengers and crew killed in a military flight that crashed soon after takeoff in Tehran. The plane hit a Tehran apartment block and burst into flames killing at least 115 people.

The media victims were mostly Iranian radio and television journalists heading to cover the Iran navy's manoeuvres on the Persian Gulf in southern Iran.

The crash occurred when their plane, a C-130 four-engine turboprop, crashed in the Azari suburb of Tehran, also killing 21 people on the ground. The air force plane developed engine trouble soon after take off. The plane was heading for the port city of Bandar Abbas in southern Iran when the pilot reported technical difficulties and was returning to base for an emergency landing but crashed into a densely-populated residential area. Among the media victims were at least 38 state broadcasting network employees and 10 print journalists working for different local newspapers and the Islamic Republic News Agency, IRNA.

"Every day journalists and media staff leave the office to carry out their duties, and every day they find themselves taking risks that cannot be avoided," said White. "But we expect answers to the questions now being raised about the safety of the airplane in which they were travelling."

The IFJ is supporting its local affiliate, the Association of Iranian Journalists in their calls for an immediate investigation into the cause of the crash, the latest in a string of fatal air accidents in Iran in recent years. Iran has an ageing, poorly-maintained fleet of aircraft due in part to US sanctions imposed in the 1990s which prevent it from buying US-built planes or spare parts.

The IFJ has pledged support from its International Safety Fund to assist the families of the media victims in what it says is the worst-ever single loss of life in any accident involving journalists and media staff.





Majid Asgari
Photo: Belga

PLANE CRASH IN IRAN



AliReza Baradaran(Right)
and Hassan Gharib(left)



Hasan Gharib (portrait L) and
journalist Esmael Omrani



Mohammed Sadegh



Hassan Najafi
AHXTGY00



Hasan Gharib



karbalaeeAhmad2



Mahdi MirAfzali



hassan gharib and
Smaeel Omrani(right)



Alireza Afshar
(right)



Sepahadar Sajedi

When

people think of the IFJ Safety Fund, they remember to raise money for it. Hats only go round at conferences where someone thought of the Fund. People only dig in their pockets because they know it exists. Someone has to start the ball rolling. Will you start it next time? Keep the IFJ Safety Fund in mind whenever union members get together.

How to Give

Please send donations to the IFJ member union in your country; the money will be forwarded in a lump sum and will cut the administrative costs of the Fund.

If there is no IFJ member, send the money to:

C/o IFJ Safety Fund

the IFJ Safety Fund

INTERNATIONAL safety FUND

For more information contact:

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