



Regional Seminar on Promoting Freedom of Association and the Effective Recognition of the Right to Collective Bargaining

DECLARATION OF KIGALI

Leaders and representatives of journalists' trade unions from Eastern Africa countries affiliated to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Eastern Africa Journalists Association (EAJA), came together in Kigali, Rwanda on 31st July to August 1st at a regional seminar on "Promoting Freedom of Association and the Effective Recognition of the Right to Collective Bargaining" hosted by the Association of Rwandan Journalists (ARJ) with the support of the IFJ.

In exploring key concerns over freedom of association in the region and deteriorating working conditions that journalists and media workers are subjected to, participants noted with concerns the concerted efforts by governments and media owners to deny journalists their rights to join trade unions and consequently enter into Collective Bargaining Agreements.

One of the biggest obstacles against freedom of association identified by the participants in the Eastern Africa region is the action by governments and media owners to dissuade, and even in some cases, bar journalists from joining trade unions of their choice. This ranges from interference in union activities that frustrate unions' efforts to organize, collect membership dues, negotiate and sign Collective Bargaining Agreements to improve members' terms and conditions of work. Authorities often subject journalists' elected representatives to harassment and intimidations in reprisal for their legitimate union activities. Media owners too have in numerous occasions placed obstacles to frustrate union activities.

Some governments compel journalists' unions to seek recognition from employers without legal guidelines, which is often denied – an arrangement which is systematically abused by employers to delay union recognition and thwart efforts by unions to organise and enter into Collective Bargaining Agreement talks. Unions have noted that the majority of journalists' unions in Eastern Africa are denied the right to collect their membership dues through direct check-off systems.

Participants outlined numerous cases of intimidation and repression that had created fear in independent journalists' unions, inhibiting them from operating in line with national and international standards, and forcing journalists to join state-sponsored trade unions. Some governments take numerous administrative steps to withhold legal status of independent unions, thus curtailing the right to freedom of association, organizing and to sign Collective Bargaining Agreements. They often collude with media employers to undermine journalists' rights and attempts by unions to improve working conditions.

Journalists' leaders discussed the growing attacks against journalists' and violations of trade union rights in the region, and hostile actions by politicians in supporting media employers who deny journalists these rights. These include vilifying statements in a bid to discredit and destroy the integrity of trade unions.

In acknowledging the vital role played by journalists' unions in supporting freedom of expression, participants consider these attacks as an attempt by governments and employers to suppress freedom of the media, given that journalists operating in conditions of coercion and violence cannot freely exercise their mission to report on often highly sensitive issues and hold those in power to account.

Journalists' unions in Eastern Africa resolve to:

- 1) Strive to build strong, united, democratic, independent, representative and self-sustaining unions.
- 2) Renew their commitment to building solidarity with the aim of increasing their capacity to represent journalists and other media workers. This includes encouraging wide recruitment campaigns, viable systems of membership dues collection, training of unions' leaders and carrying out reforms to strengthen leadership structures to ensure that they respond to the interests of members.
- 3) Promote a more active integration of young journalists into journalists' unions by undertaking strong initiatives to recruit new members especially those journalists working in the digital media sector, who are consistently exploited and increase the role of union representation in improving wage levels and working conditions.
- 4) Intensify their struggle for decent working conditions and defense of fundamental labour rights for journalists and other media workers such as the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, including lodging complaints at the International Labour Organisation (ILO).
- 5) Call on the IFJ and all trade union organisations in Africa and beyond to support independent journalists' trade unions in their fight for journalists' rights, media freedom, decent working conditions and social justice.

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