



International
Federation
of Journalists

JIM BOUMELHA
President

BETH COSTA
General Secretary

Open Letter to European and African Heads of State and Government Attending the Africa-EU Summit

April 2nd, 2014

Excellencies,

I am writing to ask you to include in your discussions at the Africa-EU summit the continuous imprisonment of journalists in many African states.

With 600,000 journalists in membership in 134 countries the International Federation of Journalists can speak on their behalf with authority about the plight of their colleagues, in particular in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Egypt, most of whom jailed on trumped up charges including “terrorism”.

Your summit has on its agenda strategic issues concerning development, peace and security. It is crucial however that in order to foster long-term development a free and vibrant press is fundamental to hold governments accountable and must be at the heart of your discussions on democratic governance.

The IFJ believes that media freedom and the protection of journalists should not be confined solely to occasional human rights dialogue at country levels, which have done little to improve the situation in which journalists operate in Africa, it is now crucial that the disturbing treatment of journalists is firmly on your agenda and not swept under the carpet.

The IFJ has over the years documented cases of journalists imprisoned in African states and campaigned for their release. In this, Eritrea has always stood as the foremost jailer of journalists in Africa with some 28 journalists held in the most inhumane and cruel prison conditions, some of them believed to be dead by now.

It would be difficult in the absence of the President of Eritrea to hold his government to account but a simple call from the summit for their release will have a huge resonance throughout Africa.

The Ethiopian government is another state which has also been in the spotlight for its crackdown on press freedom in recent years.

Today, with seven journalists behind bars, Ethiopia trails only Eritrea as Africa's worst jailers of the press. Among the imprisoned journalists are award-winning columnist Eskinder Nega and UNESCO world press freedom prize winner Reeyot Alemu, both of whom were targeted under the country's sweeping anti-terrorism law.

The most recent victim of Ethiopia's scandalous misuse of its antiterrorism legislation is Somali journalist Mohamed Aweys Mudey sentenced to 27 years. Not long ago this same legislation was used against two Swedish journalists reporter Martin Schibbye and photographer Johan Persson who were sentenced to 11 years in prison for "rendering support to terrorism" by interviewing people in the conflict-prone Ogaden region, and only pardoned thanks to concerted international campaigns and diplomatic pressure.

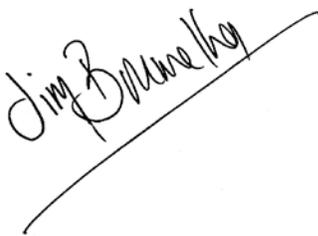
The IFJ has also accused the Military-backed Interim government in Egypt of setting out a pattern of intimidations and imprisonment of journalists, the latest being Al-Jazeera journalists on trumped up charges. Egypt currently holds 5 journalists in prison.

Other African countries (Morocco, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda) also hold journalists in jail, albeit in smaller number.

We call on all African leaders at the summit today to press these governments to free all journalists in their prisons, end intimidation of journalists and open trustworthy investigations into violence against journalists.

Your clear voice on these issues would particularly resonate throughout Africa, and give hope to independent journalists, dissidents, and human rights groups, and, most importantly, give greater credibility to your dialogue and action plan, and in particular your focus in the field of governance and human rights.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jim Boumelha", written over a long, thin horizontal line that extends to the right.

Jim Boumelha
President
International Federation of Journalists