COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF THE COALITION ADVOCACY STRATEGIC MEETING ON A NATIONAL POLICY FOR SAFEGUARDING PRESS FREEDOM AND JOURNALISTS SAFETY
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DATE: WEDNESDAY, 28TH SEPTEMBER 2022
VENUE: NOVARE MALL, WUSE ZONE 5, ABUJA
TIME: 09:00am
INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development – CJID (formerly PTCIJ) organised this strategic meeting through its Media Freedom project to design a National Policy for safeguarding press freedom and the safety of Journalists in order to seek reforms on oppressive media laws, and regulations.

The coalition convening is part of a broad project designed to understand and analyse the implications and effects of policies, acts, and regulations that impede journalism, erode press freedom and compromise the safety of Journalists in Nigeria. This draws on the need to ensure that journalism in Nigeria retains the consciousness, vibrancy and diversity required for democracy to thrive.

The aim of the convening was therefore to develop strategic advocacy actions that can mitigate the various threats targeted at press freedom, freedom of expression and journalists’ safety. The country in recent times has witnessed a violation of citizens’ rights to hold opinions, access information, and express themselves as guaranteed under section 39 of the Nigerian Constitution.

The event, which was organised in partnership with Heinrich Boll Stiftung held on Wednesday 28th September 2022 at Room 204, Novare mall, Wuse zone 5, Abuja. It brought together Media Executives, Journalists, Civil Society Actors, and Senior Stakeholders in Nigeria’s media space.

The event commenced with opening remarks by Busola Ajibola, the Deputy Director of the Journalism programme of the CJID. She emphasised that the stakeholders’ strategic meeting was organised by the Centre to bring to the fore issues constraining press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria. Busola said the National Policy for safeguarding press freedom and Journalists’ safety would lead to concrete actions that would redeem the freedom of the press and put journalism on the pedestal where it belongs.

The Deputy Manager of the Media Freedom Project at the CJID, Stephanie O. Adams-Douglas moved on to facilitate a session where stakeholders examined the nature of attacks against the Media. Stephanie recalled that the CJID in 2017, started gathering data on
Between 2020 and 2022, the tracker recorded 179 attacks against the Press with 2019 accounting for more of these attacks and 2022 leading behind. Perpetrators of these attacks include state actors, non-state actors, civilians, and the unknown. State actors account for more than 50% of these attacks while non-state actors led the chart behind.

According to the Press Attack Tracker - a civic technology used to track harassment against Journalists, from 1985 till date, there are over 450 verified records of attacks against Journalists. These attacks include physical attacks, illegal arrests, equipment damage/seizures, threats (to include legal threats), harassments, denials of access and even deaths.

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The Media space is becoming more hostile as attempts are made to restrict the movements of Journalists within and outside the country. There have been documented cases of media practitioners being harassed at the point of entering or exiting the country.

Constant attempts to regulate the Media through hostile regulations constrain freedom of expression and press freedom.

Apart from the threats identified in 4 above, Journalists are also faced with financial threats ranging from poor remunerations, non-payment of salaries, and job insecurities amongst others.

Examples of attacks against Journalists include poor capacity developments, lack of safety kits, knowledge gap in reporting hostile environments, digital threats and intimidations, equipment seizures, access denials, frivolous lawsuits, physical harassments, arrests, detentions and sometimes, deaths.

When Journalists do not come to the realisation of the intricate connection between the survival of democracy and conscious journalism, they can engage in acts that are anti-journalism e.g. going against public interest to promote narrow interests for personal benefits or suppress the truth.

Attacks and harassment of Journalists have somewhat become a norm in Nigeria even though it cannot be isolated from the global trend of threats against Journalists and their newsrooms. The job of a Journalist as it is known is to keep society open against entities and individuals that would rather have certain information concealed from the public in a bid to avoid transparency and accountability.

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ISSUES IDENTIFIED

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Journalism is a public enterprise dedicated to advancing democracy. The Media must challenge itself to come up with innovative thinking that allows it to build a sustainable business model that ensures that journalism survives as a social enterprise that works to ensure that democracy does not deteriorate.

Media stakeholders and other civil societies should advocate that a special provision be made in the constitution to guarantee press freedom. As of now, Section 22 CFRN (1999), which attempts this function is non-justiciable.

There is a need to engage with the Judiciary through the National Judicial Council (NJC) on the need to protect the freedom of the press by reinforcing the rule of law.

Sustained engagement with Journalists on national and regional policies that protect them and how best to navigate encumbrances provided by hostile regulations.

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There is a need for a National Policy that considers appropriate insurance and safety policies for Journalists.

That there is a need to engage digital platforms on the need to utilise their platforms to promote factual journalism. Information disorder as currently amplified by tech platforms is drowning up factual and rigorous journalism while denying citizens the right to access free press.
Internet platforms need to include mechanisms that will guarantee the safety of Journalists, independence and freedom of the press as well as media sustainability.

The Media must always have a purpose of public interest and must seek to promote inclusion by ensuring storytelling captures and reflects the world’s diversity.
The contents of this communiqué were agreed on by all stakeholders present and adopted.

Dated 28th September 2022
Witnessed by Representatives of

1. The Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID)
2. Premium Times (PT)
3. Daily Trust
4. The Cable Foundation
5. The Punch
6. TechHer NG
7. DATAPHYTE
8. Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ)
9. Associated Press (AP)
10. Nigeria Media Innovative Program (NAMIP)
11. The Guardian
12. Arise Television
13. News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)
14. Centre for Media law
15. LightRay Media
16. Order Paper Nigeria
17. International Centre for Investigative Journalism (ICIR)
18. Institute for Media and Society (IMS)