



Commonwealth Journalists Association

NEWSLETTER

December 2022

President's Report

It's been a momentous year for the Commonwealth.

The death of Queen Elizabeth, a new King and much valid discussion about the future of the Commonwealth itself.

There was a contentious leaders' summit in Rwanda that came and went with news media struggling to find headlines.

The UK midlands city of Birmingham hosted the Commonwealth Games while the CJA hosted a successful international gathering of early and mid-career journalists in the same city.

And there was COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

Of the flood of COP27 information competing for attention, it's worth reflecting on the Commonwealth Secretariat's contribution including Secretary-General Patricia Scotland's [speech](#) and a general overview of the Secretariat's efforts [here](#).

Their work was a stand out and especially important to the states most vulnerable to climate change.

Commonwealth Media Principles

Great news from the November meeting of Commonwealth Law Ministers who unanimously agreed to approve Commonwealth Principles on freedom of expression and the role of the media in good governance.

As you can read in William Horsley's newsletter piece below, the law ministers recommended the Principles be forwarded to the Heads of Government at their meeting in Samoa in 2024.

This is a major step forward for the CJA and five other professional Commonwealth groups. They began this effort to achieve protection of freedom of expression in general and the rights of journalists specifically three years ago.

Colleagues William and David Page deserve enormous credit for their

patient and painstaking efforts to push this all-Commonwealth initiative forward.

But as William suggests, the rubber hits the road in Samoa where political leadership and a new willingness on the part of leaders to avoid watering down the principles will be key.

At the branches

Our colleagues in Sri Lanka and India continue to co-operate on initiatives to strengthen journalism in the region.

And colleagues at the small but active Sarawak chapter have been busy despite operating in a region badly impacted by COVID.

Chairperson Alice Wee reports that, despite limited resources, they were able to organize webinars and, like so many organizations across the world, are seeing hybrid or totally virtual meetings - training workshops, seminars etc - as the way of the future.

“We have successfully organized online meetings and held a small webinar workshop attended by eleven journalists and facilitated by a local trainer in July,” she reports.

CJA Sarawak also met the German Ambassador to Malaysia during his visit to Kuching in June. They discussed the possibility of future collaboration in journalism development.

The branch intends to organize more workshops and training focusing on early career journalists and students contemplating a career in journalism.

As we move into 2023, we need to remind ourselves that too many Commonwealth journalists continue to work under repressive conditions. Journalists should not have to risk their lives and livelihoods to do their jobs.

To all our newsletter readers: May your 2023 be safe and healthy.

Chris Cobb is CJA President. ■

Media Freedom

In early December, Commonwealth Law Ministers took steps towards a stronger Commonwealth code for Media Freedom at the 2022 Law Ministers Meeting. They will now recommend a set of principles on freedom of expression and media at the next CHOGM. Details from [the Commonwealth Foundation](#).

CJA executive member William Horsley writes about the law ministers’ decision: The adoption of the Media Principles is a significant moment for the Commonwealth’s 56 member countries, but practical and effective actions must follow. Political leadership and a self-critical approach will be needed to fulfil the still hollow public commitment made in the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles: to ensure that professional media is “protected by law in its freedom to report and comment on public affairs”.



William Horsley discusses media freedom at a 2022 event at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies

It is also a major achievement for the Commonwealth Journalists Association and the five other Commonwealth-affiliated professional groups which took the initiative in 2018 by publishing a carefully-crafted Media Principles document. It grew out of a wide consultation process and careful regard for existing Commonwealth commitments and international standards relating to the role of the media in a functioning democracy. At the public launch of the Principles shortly before the 2018 London CHOGM they were warmly applauded by civil society voices across the Commonwealth.

But it took more than three years of tireless work, persistent lobbying and many setbacks before the professional associations could gain the serious attention of the Secretariat and member states. Last month,

though, the Law Ministers expressed gratitude to the Commonwealth Accredited Organisations for their “dedication and valuable contribution” in developing the Draft Principles, which formed a basis for the final Principles text after being examined and revised in 2021 by a committee of specialist officials representing member states. William’s full statement can be found on the [CJA website](#).

More on media freedom:

- In November, the Commonwealth Foundation hosted an online debate on [The People’s Voice: A Stronger Commonwealth Code for Media Freedom](#). Speakers included Justice Chile Eboe-Osuji, former president of the International Criminal Court and a member of the High-Level Legal Panel on Media Freedom, Kanbar Hossein-Bor, a senior British diplomat and International Lawyer currently serving as Deputy Director of Democratic Governance and Media Freedom Co-ordinator for the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office, Corinne Vella, sister of Daphne Caruana Galizia and Head of Media Relations for the Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation and Sneh Aurora, Executive Director of the London Office of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and a member of the Working Group of civil society representatives who advised on the media freedom principles.
 - [UN conference hears call for Commonwealth to “give teeth” to protections for journalists at risk](#) – by William Horsley ■
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Raymond Whitaker, UK chair of the CJA, reports:

CJA-UK's successful conference last summer for student journalists revealed a demand among students, and those just setting out on a journalism career, for mentoring by those with experience in the industry. A pilot scheme is under way, with 10 mentors having been recruited.

Students are being invited to apply for mentorship (those interested should [email Lucy Skoulding](#)), and the scheme will run for six months in 2023, initially in the UK alone. An assessment period will follow. If the scheme is judged worthwhile, the aim would be to expand it within the UK, and to help other branches set up their own mentorship programmes.

“Commonwealth, Media and Climate Change” was the title of a Zoom seminar on November 9 which examined the evolving role of the media in covering environmental issues in Commonwealth countries. Roger Harrabin, the BBC's former energy and environment analyst, who continues to cover these issues at the Corporation, took a pessimistic view ahead of the COP27 summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, one that proved justified by events.

Dr James Painter of the Reuters Institute presented detailed research on the rise of environmental reporting and the differing approaches to the issue between media in the global South and North. Jayashree Nandi, the environment and climate correspondent of India's Hindustan Times, emphasised the need to relate the impact of climate change to ordinary people's lives.

The participants agreed that the days were long past when climate sceptics were given free rein to challenge the existence of climate change. The question now was how far journalists could go in advocating action to prevent environmental disaster.

The seminar was the result of CJA-UK's collaboration with the Commonwealth Studies Institute at London University.

A recording of the event is at

<https://commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/podcasts/commonwealth-media-and-climate-change> ■

CJA executive member Drito Alice writes about Cyber Law from Uganda:

The Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act 2022 signed in October by President Yoweri Museveni is yet another hard blow to freedom of media and expression in Uganda. The law is widely viewed by [journalists](#) as a “bad Christmas” and an indicator that the worst is yet to come.



Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. *Source: Reporters Without Borders (RSF)*

The Cyber Law re-enforces other existing anti-media Laws and will enhance an environment for those in power to harass, arrest, detain and silence journalists, rights activists, human rights defenders and the political opposition.

The anti-media law which is highly contested by [media freedom bodies](#), including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), [rights-based groups](#), including Amnesty International and Unwanted Witness, and journalists over the criminalisation of social media platforms and the ability to use disguised identities and the use of recording of voices or videos without a person’s consent. Many journalists fear that it will further complicate their work and have vowed to fight the law to the end. Around 13 petitioners including media establishments and rights activists have launched complaints in the Constitutional Court.

Critics have said that the law does not conform to accepted international standards and is a serious threat to the use of digital media, freedom of expression and the digital civic space.

A [number of people](#) have already been charged and jailed under Uganda's digital laws, including the former Makerere Research Fellow [Dr Stella Nyanzi](#) for criticising President Museveni, Mukono Municipality MP and former newspaper stringer [Betty Nambooze](#) and [blogger Kasagga Bashir](#), aka Kasagga Matovu.

However [some experts say](#) there are good elements in the law in terms of protecting privacy, personal data and hacking information.

[More on Uganda from the Uganda Journalists Association later in this newsletter.] ■

Africa

Nigeria: Media and information literacy (MIL) as a veritable tool for fighting information disorder, By Chiamaka Okafor:

Media and information literacy, a new area of engagement developed by UNESCO, seeks to help citizens to understand the different dimensions and impacts of information disorder in society.

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/561859-media-and-information-literacy-mil-as-a-veritable-tool-for-fighting-information-disorder-by-chiamaka-okafor.html> ■

Nigeria: Police detain, charge two journalists for WhatsApp messages: [The Committee to Protect Journalists](#) said that the journalists were accused of criminal conspiracy, defamation, inciting disturbance, injurious falsehood, and cyberstalking. ■

South Africa: [The CPJ reports](#) that a South African court has banned independent media outlets from publishing leaked intelligence report. ■

[The Uganda Journalists Association writes:](#) Is Journalism now a “Crime” in Uganda?

In Uganda today, it is becoming riskier to practice journalism as harassment of journalists heightens.

The 2022 global press freedom index released by the Reporters Without Borders indicates that Uganda’s press freedom index has continued to backslide, with the country dropping to 132 out of 180.

This drop is seven steps down compared to the 2021 index where the country was ranked 125 out of 180 countries. The years; 2020 and 2021 were some of the worst years of journalism under the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) government.

A survey conducted by the Uganda Journalists Association (UJA) between 2nd November 2020 (presidential nominations) up to May 12th 2021

(during elections and postelection period), under the Report titled; 2021 Scientific Elections: The Worst Experience for Journalists, shows that rights for over 50 journalists were violated.

Cases include beatings, confiscation of work tools, vandalism of work tools, arrests with detentions, intimidation by the security forces and even members of the public and internet shut down by the state on polling day, were recorded before, during, and after the 2021 elections.

Some journalists were targeted by security forces—especially those covering opposition candidates Robert Kyagulanyi Sentamu Bobi Wine of National Unity Palatform (NUP) and Patrick Amuriat Obboi of Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) and are yet to recover.

First, the government demanded that all journalists covering elections reapply for accreditation. Paul Ekochu, the chairman of the Ugandan government's Media Council, said that scrutiny was needed to guarantee journalists' safety.

In an unprecedented move, the Ugandan Media Council cancelled the accreditations of all foreign journalists residing in the country, telling them to re-apply within 7 days. In the weeks before, a significant number of foreign journalists were either expelled from the country or prohibited from entering.

Then on December 5, 2020, Uganda deported Canadian Broadcasting Corporation journalists Margaret Evans, Lily Martin and Jean-Francois Bisson, a videographer. The government claimed that foreign journalists were favoring opposition candidates.

In an unexpected move, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) wrote to Google Inc on December 9, 2020, urging the search giant to block all Ugandan YouTube channels that were reportedly spreading negative sentiments during elections.

All of the YouTube channels that UCC wanted blocked belonged to the opposition pundits.

Covering anti-government protests has become a crime, with brutality against journalists now becoming a culture. Read the UJA's full report here - <https://ujaofficial.org/2022/07/22/a-summary-report-2020-2021-2022/> ■

Americas

Everything to know about **Canada's Online News Act** hearings from [Colombia Journalism Review](#): Parliamentary hearings for Canada's Online News Act – or the Liberal government's attempt to rectify the imbalance between platforms and publishers—have so far yielded insight into the news industry's reluctance to wholly embrace the legislation as it stands. The hearings have also captured the attention of stakeholders not only in Canada but globally as countries, including the US, Brazil, and India, to consider legislation of their own.

[The Press Gazette](#) adds: Canada stands poised to become the second country after Australia to pass legislation – [known as the Online News Act of C-18](#) – that will force Google and Facebook to pay for news. Canadian-American journalist Heidi Legg, who leads the research for the Future of Media Project at Harvard University, sets out why she believes transparency should be at the heart of Ottawa's legislation. ■

The Caribbean: “Today, a majority of Caricom countries either have weak or ineffective access to information laws, and almost half have none at all” – [Wesley Gibbings, Trinidad Guardian/ Caribbean Journalism](#). ■

Asia

[The Scroll India](#) “Will the three-member grievance appellate committees to be set up to address complaints against intermediaries under the Information Technology Act, 2000, actually “empower users”, as Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw promised?”

Technology policy experts are not so sure. They believe that the committees announced by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on October 28 give the government sweeping powers of censorship on the internet. ■

Indian authorities prevent Pulitzer-winning Kashmiri journalist Sanna Irshad Mattoo from flying abroad, says [the Committee to Protect Journalists](#). ■



Sanna Irshad Mattoo. *Source: Pulitzer*

Several Journalists' Bodies, Others Speak Out on Searches at 'The Wire', Its Editors' Homes

'We call on authorities and politicians to cease the harassment,' [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) said. ■

Pakistan

[Dawn newspaper writes](#): In a letter to Pakistani consulate in Dubai, FIA and IB seek assistance in **Arshad Sharif murder probe**

The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Intelligence Bureau (IB) on Tuesday wrote a letter to the Consul General of Pakistan in Dubai seeking information on slain journalist Arshad Sharif's stay in the city before his murder earlier this year.

Sharif was [shot dead](#) in Kenya on October 24. Initially, [Kenyan media](#) quoted the local police as saying Sharif was shot dead by police in a case of "mistaken identity".

But later reports from the Kenyan media reconstructed the events surrounding the killing, stating that an occupant in Sharif's car at the time of his killing was believed to have shot at paramilitary General Service Unit (GSU) officers.

The government subsequently [formed](#) a team that travelled to Kenya to investigate the killing.

Also: The [International Federation of Journalists \(IFJ\)](#) on the campaign against impunity for Arshad Sharif's murder ■

Australia

[Australia says law making Google pay for news a 'success'](#)

Treasury report says media outlets have signed more than 30 deals compensating them for news shared on platforms. Australia's world-first law forcing Big Tech to pay for news has been a success and Canberra should consider extending it to social media platforms such as TikTok and Twitter, a government report has found. Canberra passed [landmark legislation last year](#) that obligates Google and Facebook to strike deals compensating media outlets for news content on their platforms or allow a government-appointed arbitrator to decide how much they should pay. [More from Al Jazeera](#).

[Australian media watch website Mumbrella](#) adds: While some organisations have expressed disappointment in the code's failure to enforce commercial agreements with Meta and Google, the report said its purpose is to ensure "fair remuneration" for publications, not "to redistribute resources across the news sector". ■

[The Guardian Australia writes](#): Partner of detained Australian journalist Cheng Lei hopeful of 'compassionate and speedy resolution'

Nick Coyle said it was positive that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and foreign minister Penny Wong had raised her case with their Chinese counterparts. ■

Europe

Five years after the murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, vigils took place [in Malta](#) and a number of countries. The foundation named after her [took a government official to task](#) for only recognising her work and [issued a statement](#) about Malta's reform process against a climate of

impunity. The [International Press Institute](#) said that there had still been no substantial reform in Malta four years later. Lawyer [Martina Farrugia said in November](#): “We need to be louder”. ■

UK - [The Press Gazette reports](#): National newspaper editors from across the political spectrum have urged the UK Government to crack down on intimidating legal tactics known as SLAPPs.

SLAPPs, which stands for [Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation](#), refer to lawsuits targeting journalists, news organisations, whistleblowers or other groups putting out information in the public interest that are deemed meritless and being used to bully them into silence, including by dropping a story.

[Libel](#), copyright, data protection and misuse of private information laws are all increasingly abused as SLAPPs, critics of the practice say. [The cases that get heard in court are said to be just the “tip of the iceberg”](#) as many succeed in silencing journalists through the fear of racking up substantial costs. ■

AND FINALLY...

Newsletter Information

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Twitter blue tick: Will it be worth journalists and publishers paying for?

[A view from the Press Gazette.](#)



Source: BBC

**Thanks to CJA members and others for their support in 2022 and
Happy 2023 to all our members and colleagues.**
