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FEDERATION OF AFRICAN JOURNALISTS
FÉDÉRATION DES JOURNALISTES AFRICAINS

**Presentation of Omar Faruk Osman, President,
Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) at
Africa Expert workshop on Freedom of
Expression and the prohibition of incitement
to national, racial or religious hatred**

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Africa has been known to be a continent of multifaceted conflicts, which are fueled by power struggles, social injustices, discrimination, suppression and hate mongering that are being created inside the communities. Politicians who are hungry for power are always blamed for all these acts and they rule with people that are supposed to rule justly in iron-fist and make matters worse by introducing conflicts which cannot be traced back to them but which involve clans, tribes or ethnic groups on the basis of tribalism, ethnicity, regionalism, nepotism or religion. They have long been criticized for imposing unduly harsh and repressive limitations on freedom of speech, expression, and opinion.

The media is always accused of contributing to these conflicts by inciting hatred and violence on the basis of disseminating ideas and information, and trying to make discrimination of ideas based on ethnic or tribal hatred. Journalists are singled out as e the ones driving incitement of hatred and discrimination against people of particular ethnic group to be targeted with violence.

But it is very important to look at this in its broader context. Journalists are human beings and they belong to a society which is divided on the basis of ethnicity, tribe and religion. Article 19 of the UDHR guarantees the right to freedom of expression, including the right to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of any frontiers”.

Journalists have their own natural prejudices despite strict professional norms and principles, but journalists are themselves the victims of discrimination and hatred based on their job, their ideas and their reporting of different views, including those of discriminated or people who became victim to ethnic or tribal/ethnic hate.

Inciting ethnic/tribal violence and discrimination

In war torn places, warlords and armed militias groups have been setting up their own radio stations to use media as propaganda tool, like the case of Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) du Rwanda. It is widely known that in Africa, civil wars are based on ethnicity, tribalism and religious ideology. These armed groups used the media to disseminate ideas discriminating or portraying hate for particular ethnic or tribal group. This type of the media plays one major role in the society which is fear and foreboding.

Warlord-media as known in Somalia is identified to be an instrument fueling tribal hatred and violence. These warlord-owned radio stations have been broadcasting hate propaganda. It is also known in Somalia that a privately-owned media but manipulated by clan-warlords into serving as instruments of political, tribal and ideological propaganda.

Radiodiffusion-Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI) was recently accused of propagating false information to incite hatred and violence against northern ethnic groups and tribes that support Alassane Ouattara, the man internationally believed to have won the presidential elections.

In June last year, Burundi's media community accused a radio station close to the ruling party of promoting hate as the United Nations warned against incitement to violence amid tensions. Media community complained to the National Council of Communication regulatory body to protest its lack of action in the face of broadcasts by the private Rema FM station that they

described as hateful and dangerous. It was believed that the radio was naming people of particular ethnic group.

The broadcast media in particular are twisted into tools of incitement and hatred in some countries, as was the case in Uganda during Idi Amin's dictatorship who used radio to maintain his reign of horror by inciting hatred against tribes or ethnic groups. And the most recent example is of course the 'killing radio', la Radio/Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) du Rwanda.

Reporting on homophobia is no easy task in Africa and brings on board the issue of the discrimination that media is leading against particular people, mainly in Uganda and Cameroon. Religion, culture and tradition, the law or the state's instruments of force, are by far the major constraints to free reporting on homophobia. Government hostility to sexual minorities appears to be a reflection of popular perceptions of society and while bringing pressure to bear on government may be one way of protecting these rights, a much wider campaign targeting attitude change and creating understanding could bring more enduring results.

At least three tabloids in Uganda are openly homophobic. Their coverage of the subject and exposure of the identities of alleged gay people has led them to develop a lexicon of derogatory references to the gay and outright invasion of private space.

In a landmark judgment, the Ugandan High Court on January 3, issued a restraining order against one such tabloid, The Rolling Stone, which had began to publish the identities of 100 alleged homosexuals. The court further imposed damages of Uganda shillings 1.5 million (\$650) in favour of each of the 100 petitioners. The Rolling Stone has since folded.

Hate Crimes against Journalists

In Africa ethnical, tribal or religious hatred are common. This hatred results in hate crimes against journalists.

Politicians in Africa who are mostly organized on the basis of tribe, ethnic or religious have mobilized or organized hate crimes against journalists who are targeted because they belong to a particular tribe, ethnic or religious group, and thus they should be discriminated against in accessing to news of particular politicians, "harmed" or even killed. These journalists are targeted because they disseminated ideas and information from warlords, leaders or members of particular people and thus their rights to life, liberty and security are endangered tremendously, threatening the equal enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens of the country.

Journalists unions and associations in Africa have also reported cases of journalists who belong to so-called minority clans, tribes or ethnic groups are not only victims of discrimination but also brutal crimes since they are not deemed not to belonging to powerful clan/tribe or ethnic.

Some governments and powerful political elements misuse the proper justification of incitement of hatred and violence against journalists and their media houses as a pretext to suppress the rights to freedom of expression.

Although cases of murders and serious assaults against journalists are generating some attention through the media, the day-to-day harassment and discrimination is thought to be widely under-reported. Journalists are particularly considered as part of vulnerable groups who seek to get information and reveal the truth which is not liked by certain politicians and immediately try to endanger them.

In April 2010, three Nigerian journalists were murdered in Nigerian cities of Lagos and Jos because of their religious background and the newspapers they work for as part of religious based violence.

In Somalia, at least 15 journalists are suspected to have been killed on religious based ideology fight that Islamists have been waging in Somalia. Journalists were asked either to defend their religion or resign from the profession otherwise they should be paid through the bullets. They were insistently told that they cannot be neutral when their religion is under attack.

Ivorian journalist Adja Diané, editor of online magazine Ipetrolenews.info was stabbed to death in her Abidjan Apartment on 3 February 2011. A neighbor reported hearing the victim speaking to somebody in Malinké, a language spoken in the north of Ivory Coast and in neighbouring countries such as Mali, Guinea Bissau and Senegal. Shortly afterwards, the victim was heard shouting "he is going to kill me", according to the neighbour. Residents of Abidjan who come from the north are labeled supporters of the internationally recognized winner of the last presidential, Alassane Ouattara, and are often victims of attacks from southerners who back his rival, Laurent Bagbo.

In June 2010, the Federation of African Journalists learned about the killing of journalist Jean Léonard Rugambage who was murdered in Kigali, Rwanda, and the suspect killer confessed in a court that he had killed the journalist in revenge for his father, who, according to the killer, was killed by the journalist during genocide era. More than 20 Rwandan journalists who mostly belonged to Tutsi community were murdered during the genocide period. On the other hand, the hate journalists, many are being prosecuted by the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Unfortunately, in many cases, journalists find themselves faced with a big dilemma. They either participate actively in the affairs of government or associate themselves with the leadership of an armed group and allow themselves to be used for incitement of hatred, by agreeing with them and supporting them all the way without comment. Or in rare cases, they may decide to make responsible judgments and stand up for reason and tell the truth, thus risking their very lives. It is known for sure how many journalists who were either detained or at the very worst assassinated or lynched for having disagreed with or contradicted those who wanted to use them as tool for incitement.

Blasphemy Laws and the Suppression of Freedom of Expression

The issue of blasphemy laws and other restrictions on freedom of expression in Africa are also sources of threats to freedom of expression and the unfair treats against journalists in Africa. Most of the victims of false blasphemy accusations are against the citizens who are mostly in religious minority but journalists who even give space to these people are victimized because of that.

These laws restrict certain forms of speeches and expressions, and they are used to justify the banning of books, movies, and other media of any particular faith and give religious hardliners the ammunitions to attack particular people in the society.

The blasphemy laws have also been used to censor journalist or force the media to avoid reporting on certain religious issues as taboo. Those who are accused under blasphemy laws do not enjoy due process and a fair hearing in the judiciary system.