

Media under gun in Africa

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Press freedom is being increasingly compromised in Southern Africa, where journalists and media owners are being targeted for exposing the truth.



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Amnesty International, in marking World Press Freedom Day yesterday, said the intimidation of journalists sent a frightening and intimidating message that made reporters censor themselves.

"From Angola to Zambia we have seen disturbingly brazen attacks on press freedom which have a chilling effect on those working in the media.

"Across the region, journalists have been targeted simply for exposing the truth," said Deprose Muchena, Amnesty International's regional director for Southern Africa.

Amnesty International cited cases in which journalists have been shot, intimidated, harassed and charged.

South Africa has witnessed two such high-profile incidents in the past month alone.

Sunday Times investigative journalist Mzilikazi wa Afrika was threatened for his reporting on lucrative tenders awarded by state power utility Eskom.

He was given 24-hour security after the newspaper received credible information that his house was being watched and his life was in danger.

Katharine Child, a journalist for The Times newspaper, was bruised after being manhandled by a person who identified himself as a policeman at a religious event hosted by the Gupta family.

Elsewhere in Africa, Lesotho Times editor Lloyd Mutungamiri narrowly survived a shooting after being attacked by unknown gunmen last year.

In Botswana, two journalists from the INK Centre for Investigative Journalism were briefly detained and threatened with death by plainclothes security agents after they tried to access an area where a private holiday home was being built for President Ian Khama.

The UN General Assembly declared May 3 World Press Freedom Day to highlight the importance of press freedom and to remind global authorities of their duty to respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression.

"When journalists are constantly harassed, intimidated and jailed simply for doing their work, it sends a frightening message to other journalists - causing them to self-censor and undermining the whole profession," said Amnesty's Muchena.

Source: The Times

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