



INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

COVID-19'S IMPACT ON MEDIA ACTORS, CIVIC SPACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Consortium for Human Rights and Media in Africa (WITS Journalism) – 06 May 2020

Ayodamola Owoseye – Premium Times, Nigeria:

There are cases of **harassment of journalists in Nigeria**. Even cases where we saw journalists being banned for life because they **criticized the government's** response to COVID19. If you try to go on the field and take picture, you can be harassed by security forces. Government is trying to control what the media can do and not do. We, as journalists in Nigeria are **not feeling safe during this crisis**.

In **Nigeria**, figures are usually **announced by the government**. There are daily briefings given to journalists, where we can ask all the questions we want. We also have good virologists and professor sharing the knowledge they have on the virus.

Overall the government is **not supportive of the media**. Yes, they give information, but, as journalists, we are on the **frontline** and we deal with **threats** from the government sometimes through special security measures. We struggle to get information on the ground. **Freedom must be given to the press**.

Julius Ocunqi – Uganda Radio Network:

When the curfew was imposed in **Uganda**, we knew our work as journalists would be **restrained**. You can get **arrested and humiliated** if you do not respect the rules imposed by the governments. Many journalists in Uganda felt **threatened** since the beginning of the crisis. When journalists are criticizing the government's action, they are harassed, just for **speaking the truth**.

In **Uganda**, most of the confirmed cases are **announced by the state**. All the information about COVID19 channels through **government communications**. The government is **controlling all the information**.

Muthoki mumo – Committee to Protect Journalists:

We see the same **trends of crackdown on journalists in Africa**, not only in Uganda and Nigeria. New laws are being implemented in a way that is **restrictive to press freedom**, in South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia.

We have also seen a **rise in the arrest and assault on journalists** trying to cover the crisis. We are concerned about the **press freedom issue**, in term of access to information. Journalists asking questions about COVID19 are not getting their questions answered. There is **not enough transparency**.

We are seeing journalist being more cautious about questioning the government action. It is **dangerous for press freedom**. If we want to release the information that the public needs and wants, journalists must be able to go on the field and **question freely** topics related to COVID19.

Paul Mulindwa – CIVICUS:

Governments are using COVID19 to **consolidate power and restrict civic space**. Civil society organizations have to re-invent themselves. A lot of **online work** is done and efforts to **protect human rights** are put in place. Civil society actors are also looking at **new ways of protecting their work** and data.

One thing we can appreciate during this crisis is the way **we rethink our online interactions**. Webinars are **incredible opportunity** to reach a huge amount of people online. It is a great opportunity to engage with actors and **colleagues across the world**.

It is complicated to get information from other sources than the government. **Sources are limited to a few people**, from top government agencies. **A journalist cannot spread information** that was not issued by the government before.