

Safrea joins the call to halt attacks on journalists in KZN

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The Southern African Freelancers' Association (Safrea) joined in the call for an end to attacks on journalists in KwaZulu-Natal that prevents them from doing their job.



The organisation was part of the Durban Dialogues multi-stakeholder Media Freedom Round Table where the recent spate of attacks on journalists in the region was strongly condemned. The discussions, convened by the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) and Durban Dialogues, a platform that promotes dialogue and discussion, took place at the ICC on Tuesday, 19 June 2018.

It was attended by title editors from key media institutions, journalists and representatives of SANEF and Safrea.

In recent months, journalists in the region have come under attack at service delivery protests, while some have experienced verbal and physical abuse and have been manhandled by police at crime scenes. It is of concern that some journalists are also receiving threatening phone calls from certain political leaders.

At the recent court appearance of former president, Jacob Zuma, some journalists were intimidated by his supporters. This kind of behaviour has also extended to recent political rallies and gatherings. Intimidation has even crossed virtual boundaries to cyber-bullying, which has forced some journalists to even close their social media accounts.

Stakeholders are of the opinion that if not addressed, these attacks will escalate, especially in the run up to the 2019 general elections.

The following resolutions were taken at Tuesday's discussions:

- For the IEC to monitor the situation and call on political parties to adhere to the Code of Conduct in the Electoral Act that allows journalists to cover the elections freely and without intimidation.
- A call on President Cyril Ramaphosa to intervene in the attacks on journalists and condemn it as part of "his new dawn" agenda.
- The setting up of a quick response system where journalists can report all transgressions without fear or intimidation by calling 082 379 4957.
- The rollout of safety workshops for journalists in the form of workshops and seminars as well as safety coaching sessions in the newsrooms.
- The identification of key trauma counsellors who will be on 24-hour standby to assist and support journalists in trouble.
- A strategy to deepen public understanding of the crucial role a free media plays in a democratic society.

Safrea believes strongly in creating a safe environment in which its members can work. It supports any effort to ensure this happens and will actively advocate for its members and endorse campaigns to ensure their safety.

Media freedom is enshrined in the constitution of the country. And the safety of journalists is core to upholding this freedom. Safrea supports the meeting's stance that it is critical that journalists be able to do their jobs without being in peril. If need be, the authorities, police, the IEC and even the community must rally to protect them.

- For more information contact Mary Papayya (Convener: Durban Dialogues/Deputy Chair SANEF Media Freedom Sub-Committee) on 082 379 4957.

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