

Criticism for UN Human Rights Council from world's press

GÖTEBORG, SWEDEN: The World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and World Editors Forum (WEF) has condemned what it terms the United Nations Human Rights Council's repeated effort to undermine freedom of expression in the name of protecting religious sensibilities. "WAN reminds the UN that the council's proper role is to defend freedom of expression and not to support the censorship of opinion at the request of autocracies," the WAN board said in a resolution issued during the World Newspaper Congress and World Editors Forum, which ends today, Wednesday, 4 June 2008, in Göteborg, Sweden.

WAN and WEF issued six other resolutions to:

1. Condemn widespread press freedom violations during the recent presidential elections in Zimbabwe (read the full resolution at www.wan-press.org/article17295.html);
2. Invite newly-elected Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to "decisively support and promote freedom of the press in Russia (full resolution at www.wan-press.org/article17287.html);
3. Appeal to African leaders to abolish libel and criminal defamation laws and to promote and implement the highest standards of press freedom as outlined in the Table Mountain Declaration (full resolution at www.wan-press.org/article17291.html);
4. Call on Chinese authorities to release all imprisoned journalists and cyber-reporters ahead of the upcoming Olympic Games and to honour the press freedom commitments it made in its successful Olympic bid (full resolution at www.wan-press.org/article17283.html);
5. Condemn the continued imprisonment of fourteen journalists in Eritrea and call for their release (full resolution at www.wan-press.org/article17285.html);
6. And to express deep concern over the growing tendency of sports organisations to restrict press coverage of their events, both in print and digitally (full resolution at www.wan-press.org/article17289.html).

In the resolution condemning actions by the UN Human Rights Council, WAN cited the council's approval of an amendment proposed by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference requiring the council's investigators to "report on instances where the abuse of the right to freedom of expression constitutes an act of racial or religious discrimination."

WAN said the amendment "goes against the spirit" of the work of the Special Rapporteur and would require him to investigate abusive expression "rather than focusing on the endemic problem of abusive limits on expression imposed by governments, including many of those on the Council."

"The WAN Board is concerned at what appears to be the emergence of a negative trend against freedom of expression in the UN Human Rights Council," the resolution said. "In March 2007, the council has already passed a resolution, sponsored by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which opened the door to the restrictions of freedom of expression by governments on the grounds that it might offend religious sensibilities."

The UN Human Rights Council, whose stated purpose is to address human rights violations, is the successor to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which was often criticised for the high-

profile positions it gave to member states that did not guarantee the human rights of their own citizens. International human rights groups have expressed concern that the Council may be emulating the practices that discredited the Commission on Human Rights.

The WAN resolution called on the council president and UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon “to protect the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and to ensure that international standards of freedom of expression are fully supported by the UN Human Rights Council and not undermined by it.” The resolution can be read at www.wan-press.org/article17293.html.

For more on the World Newspaper Congress and World Editors Forum, go to www.wansweden2008.com

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>