

JOINT ACTION – INTERNATIONAL

24 November 2009

40 IFEX members call for the protection of women who exercise free speech

SOURCE: International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) on behalf of the IFEX Gender Working Group

(IFJ/IFEX) - The following is a joint appeal from 40 IFEX members:

**40 IFEX members call for concrete measures to end violence against women who speak out courageously**

To mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November, we, the undersigned 40 members of the International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX), express solidarity with women who have been the victims of violence for exercising their free expression rights.

On this day we call attention to the situation of the many women who face threats and are subject to targeted attacks because of their gender (see list below). Death threats, kidnapping, physical attacks, including assaults, flogging and killings, as well as sexual, verbal and judicial harassment are atrocities that many women journalists, writers and activists face the world over, particularly in countries where freedom of speech is not upheld.

This year, several women have been murdered or threatened with death in regions around the world. On 11 January, **Uma Singh**, a print and broadcast journalist, was brutally attacked and killed by 15 men at her home in Dhanusa, Nepal. Singh, 24, was a role model for many young women in Nepal who sought to join the journalism profession. She investigated illegal land grabs and opposed threats to women's rights, including the local tradition of costly dowries. On the night of Singh's murder, "Kantipur Daily" correspondent **Manika Jha** received death threats from a group who said "now it is your turn". These attacks followed demands made by women journalists in Dhanusa who complained that dozens of female media staff had been forced to quit their jobs following threats from armed groups.

**Natalya Estemirova**, who worked for the human rights group Memorial and wrote for "Novaya Gazeta", was abducted at her home in Grozny in the Chechen Republic, on 15 July. Her body was later found in neighbouring Ingushetia, with gunshot wounds. The journalist had been investigating atrocities committed in Chechnya and the North Caucasus, convinced "the determination and courage of those who were not prepared to put up with this lawlessness would win in the end."

In May 2009, death threats and harassment of award-winning Mexican author, journalist and activist **Lydia Cacho** escalated, giving rise to fears for her safety. Cacho was watched and followed by unknown armed individuals and has been receiving death threats via her [blog](#) since February 2009. Following publication of her first book in 2005 on child pornography in Mexico, Cacho was illegally arrested, detained and ill treated before being subjected to a year-long criminal defamation lawsuit. She was cleared of all charges in 2007, but her attempts to gain legal redress for her treatment have been thwarted.

Women have also been victims of physical assault and harassment by state authorities. In July 2009, in Sudan, **Lubna Ahmed Al-Hussein**, an outspoken journalist, women's rights activist, and United Nations employee was arrested at a restaurant along with several other women for "sensational dressing up" and threatening the values of Sudanese society for wearing trousers. Ten of the arrested women opted to plead guilty, immediately

receiving 10 lashes and fines. Hussein, along with two others, opted to fight the charges, in part to raise attention to the situation of women's rights in Sudan. The courts ordered her to pay a fine or spend a month in prison. When she chose prison to stand up for her rights, the Sudanese Journalist Union intervened and paid it on her behalf - against her wishes. Women defending Hussein faced further persecution. When they took to the streets to protest her sentencing, 50 women lawyers, activists and journalists - all part of the initiative "NO for women oppression" - were arrested and beaten by police forces. **Amal Habbani**, a columnist in "Ajrass Al Horreya", is still facing defamation-related charges and an enormous fine after she defended Hussein.

These cases demonstrate the severity of the violence and intimidation outspoken women face when reporting on matters of public interest, or defending human rights.

We, the undersigned:

- Condemn all forms of repression against women citizens and professionals exercising their free expression rights and call attention to the cases of gendered-based violence carried out against outspoken women this year (see list below).
- Call for the Nepali authorities to undertake a thorough investigation into the cases of Uma Singh and Manika Jha to ensure that the true perpetrators are identified and will be effectively prosecuted and convicted.
- Call for the Russian authorities to undertake a thorough investigation into the murder of Natalya Estemirova and other activists who have been targets of violence and to ensure that the true culprits are brought to justice.
- Appeal to the Mexican authorities to undertake a thorough investigation into the threats against Lydia Cacho and to ensure her safety.
- Call on the Sudanese authorities to waive all charges against Amal Habbani and to rescind any and all laws that contravene women's rights as outlined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Stand in solidarity with the many women around the world who face injustice and gender-based violence for carrying out their civic and professional duties.
- Urge national governments, police agencies, and employers to provide adequate protection to women journalists, human rights defenders, writers and bloggers and invest in gender-related education programmes in order that women may work freely and report on any issue, including women's' rights.
- Ask that national authorities undertake full and uncompromising investigations into the cases of women journalists', writers, activists and bloggers who have been victims of violence in order that their attackers and killers face justice.

It is time for governments, international institutions and media employers to take concrete measures to end the atrocities our female colleagues face in the course of their work.

Signed,

1. Adil Soz, International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech, Kazakhstan
2. Africa Free Media Trust (AFMT), Kenya
3. Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), Indonesia
4. Associação Brasileira de Jornalismo Investigativo (ABRAJI), Brazil
5. Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM), Trinidad & Tobago
6. Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM), Serbia

7. Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)
8. Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), Canada
9. Cartoonists Rights Network, International (CRNI), U.S.A.
10. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ), Malaysia
11. Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), The Philippines
12. Center for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP), Liberia
13. Centro de Periodismo y Etica Publica (CEPET), Mexico
14. Centro de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala (CERIGUA), Guatemala
15. Comité por la Libre Expresión (C-Libre), Honduras
16. Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association, (EFJA), Ethiopia
17. Exiled Journalists Network (EJN),UK
18. Freedom House, U.S.A.
19. Independent Journalism Center (IJC), Moldova
20. Index on Censorship, U.K.
21. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Belgium
22. Maharat Foundation, Lebanon
23. Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), Australia
24. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), Ghana
25. Media Institute, Kenya
26. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Namibia
27. Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Nigeria
28. Media Watch, Bangladesh
29. National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), Somalia
30. Norwegian PEN, Norway
31. Observatoire pour la liberté de presse, d'édition et de creation (OLPEC), Tunisia
32. Pacific Freedom Forum (PFF), American Samoa
33. Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF), Pakistan
34. Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (Mada)
35. Public Association "Journalists" (PAJ), Kyrgyzstan
36. Reporters sans frontières (RSF), France
37. Sindicato de Periodistas del Paraguay (SPP), Paraguay
38. Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA), Thailand
39. World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), Canada
40. World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), France

The following female journalists, writers and activists have been targeted in the course of carrying out their profession in 2009:

#### **Asia Pacific**

**Uma Singh**, journalist - Nepal: Attacked, Killed

**Manika Jha**, journalist - Nepal: Death Threat

**Leah Dalmacio, Gina dela Cruz, Marites Cabutas, Neneng Montaña** – The Philippines: Murdered

**Marjorie Bandayrel-Trinidad**, editor - The Philippines: shot at

**Stella Estremera and Virginia "Gigie" Agtay**, editor, news editor, The Philippines: Threatened with death

**Marlene Esperat**, journalist - The Philippines: Continued impunity for murder in 2005

**Aung San Suu Kyi**, politician – Burma: Under house arrest, silenced

**Dileesha Abeysundara**, journalist/activist - Sri Lanka: Threatened

**Mu Sochua**, politician - Cambodia: Insulted, Defamation lawsuit

**Varanee Suesatsakulchai**, journalist - Thailand: Assaulted, Threatened **Joint Action Group for Gender Equality**

(JAG), activist coalition - Malaysia: Harassed, Intimidated, Charged

**Khadija Abdul Qahar** (Canada), journalist - Pakistan: Kidnapped (still held)

**Malalai Joya**, writer/member of parliament - Afghanistan: Threatened with death, Harassed

**Esther Tinning**, freelancer trainer and journalist – Vanuatu: violently attacked

## **Africa**

**Maimouna Bah**, journalist - Guinea: Detained, Assaulted  
**Four women journalists** - Sierra Leone: Attacked, Abducted, Sexual Violence  
**Delphie Namuto, Caddy Adzuba, Jolly Kamuntu**, journalists - Democratic Republic of Congo: Death threat  
**Sarata Jabbi-Dibba**, journalist - The Gambia: Imprisoned  
**Lubna Ahmed Al-Hussein**, journalist - Sudan: Arrested, Charged, Sentenced/Fined  
**Amal Habbani**, journalist - Sudan: Charged  
**Philo Ikonya**, writer/activist - Kenya: Assaulted, Arrested  
**Rashidatu Kadiri, Dorcas Oparibea**, journalists - Ghana: Assaulted, Banned  
**Mantoe Phakathi**, journalist - Swaziland: Harassed, Barred from covering Parliament  
**Amanda Lindhout** (Canada), journalist - Somalia: Kidnapped

## **Middle East and North Africa**

**Rozanna al-Yami**, journalist - Saudi Arabia, Sentenced to 60 lashes (later pardoned)  
**Sihem Bensedrine, Neziha Rejiba, Radhia Nasraoui, Kadhija Arfaoui**, journalists/activists - Tunisia: Assaulted, Arrested, Banned from travel, Threatened, Insulted, Harassed  
**Fatima Al Riahi (Arabicca)**, blogger - Tunisia: Detained  
**Dyala Jwayhan**, reporter/photographer and **Mais Abu-Ghazaleh**, journalist (Palestinians), Israel - attacked  
**Ghada Jamsheer**, journalist/activist - Bahrain: Threatened, Harassed, Censored  
**Lamees Dhaif, Maryam Al-Shoroogi**, journalists- Bahrain: Charged, Legal Action  
**Samia al-Aghbari**, journalist - Yemen: Insulted, Censored

## **Europe**

**Natalya Estemirova**, journalist/activist - Chechnya, Russia: Murdered  
**Durna Safarli, Layla Ilgar**, journalists- Azerbaijan: Harassed, Insulted

## **Americas and Caribbean**

**María Esther Aguilar Cansimbe**, journalist - Mexico: Disappeared  
**María de los Ángeles González Hernández**, journalist - Mexico: Death threats  
**Lydia Cacho**, journalist/writer - Mexico: Death threats, Harassment  
**María Eugenia Guerrero**, former radio host - Colombia: Sexually assaulted, Murdered  
**Sylvia Gereda, Directora** - Guatemala: threatened  
**Marielos Monzón, columnista** - Guatemala: insulted  
**Marta Yolanda Díaz-Durán**, columnista - Guatemala: charged with defamation  
**Carol Martindale**, editor - Barbados: Threatened

For more information:

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