

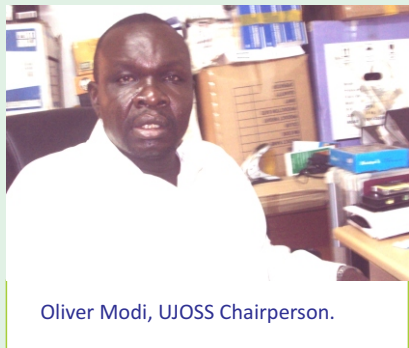
## UJOSS PRESS FREEDOM OBSERVATORY REPORT ON THE STATE OF PRESS FREEDOM ACROSS SOUTH SUDAN

By UJOSS

Amongst the challenges facing the fledgling state of South Sudan is the dire need to promote and establish the fundamental democratic principle of press freedom. In order to assist in this process, the Union of Journalists of South Sudan (UJOSS) has set up a Press Freedom Observatory (PFO) to regularly monitor the situation regarding press freedom in all ten states of South Sudan. What follows is the first report from the PFO. Santino Manut, head of government owned Warrap FM radio, says that journalists in Warrap state continue to face harassment from security forces and politicians. Because of the state's proximity to the North, security agents are overly sensitive in their monitoring of the media, meaning that journalists are forced to operate in an atmosphere of fear. Additional problems faced by reporters in Warrap are the lack of understanding of the role of the media, poor internet access and mobile phone reception, lack of training and low pay, Manut states. Hussein Makheit, a seasoned journalist based in Northern Bhar El Ghazal state capital Wau, who works as an information officer at the state Ministry of Information, asserts that even after independence, journalists continue to be viewed with a lot of suspicion by local authorities, especially security personnel, in the state. In Central Equatoria state, Charles Yuggu, a freelance journalist, reports that the media are given a very rough time by security officials and especially those in powerful positions in the government. "In some cases, media houses have been threatened with closure while individual journalists have been arrested and locked up," Yuggu states. He also notes that the problem of poor remuneration has forced many journalists out of the profession, with some securing employment as drivers with the United Nations or international or local NGOs. In Western Equatoria State, Gift Friday, a freelance journalist, says that although the state Ministry of Information has asked security personnel to stop harassing journalists, cases of harassment remain on an upward trend. He states that, "there are situations where journalists have been barred from covering some functions which state authorities consider as private while in some instances journalists have been threatened by certain politicians over material that has been broadcast. Iijo Bosco, a UJOSS member based in Eastern Equatoria state, says that, "there is nothing enjoyable here about the profession of journalism because we have to really strive hard to get news, package it and even send it. Insecurity here has also seen journalists go into hiding because some individuals feel threatened by their reports." Bosco maintains that press freedom remains a pipe dream, as the majority of local people still do not appreciate the role of the media. "We face a lot of threats because most people including those who should promote press freedom, do not really understand what we do and we are still viewed with a lot of suspicion, which makes it very difficult for us to gather news," states Bosco. In Lakes state, Abraham Machuor says that press freedom has suffered major setbacks since 2009, with journalists facing frequent arrests and sackings, especially when material broadcast on local Rumbek FM radio is perceived as unfavorable to the state authorities. He also asserts that in some cases, government officials insist on approving stories before they are released. "Some journalists, such as Peter Maliap, lost their jobs after it was alleged that they were working in the interests of the Khartoum government. This has left many of us wondering how we can survive here as journalists when any information that touches on the government is considered sensitive and classified," Machuor says.

In Upper Nile's Malakal town, there aren't many trained journalists save for a few who learnt some skills through training workshops. Julius Umma, a

reporter who often travels to this remote part of South Sudan, notes: "Here journalists have to seek permission from local authorities including the police before doing anything, including taking



Oliver Modi, UJOSS Chairperson.

photos. Journalists find it very difficult to access information, as security personnel keep on insisting that the media could be a threat to national security." In South Kordofan's Kaduguli town, there are few journalists, states Charles Mathiang, because they fear operating in the area because of the high risks involved in the North-South disputed Abyei area, although the dissemination of information from this region is essential. "Because of constant security problems, journalists have to work undercover because some people, especially the northern security forces, remain suspicious of their intentions. They are often viewed as spies by both sides and so press freedom in this area is almost non-existent. In the past some journalists have been arrested for merely taking pictures of the displaced civilian population during clashes between the northern and southern armies," says Mathiang. He adds that journalists have lost equipment, such as recorders and mobile phones, to security officers or even ordinary people, who intimidate them by threatening them with lynching. John Actually, a reporter based in Bor town in Jonglei state, says that access to information and freedom of expression is very limited there, largely due to the high level of insecurity, as the state most affected by tribal clashes. The seriously compromised security situation within the state means that journalists find it very difficult to access many places. "Journalists have to wait for invitations to cover government functions. We even have to seek permission to go out and interview ordinary people on the streets, otherwise we risk arrest and detention without any precise charges. Even traveling to the remote places affected by the clashes remains difficult and so a lot of incidents go unreported because journalists operate under constant fear of fighting or arrest," says John.

In Unity state, journalist Joseph Dodo reports that there are only three journalists operating because of the constant tensions between the northern and southern armies at the border town of Bentiu. "We cannot even talk of press freedom here because it is a dangerous area to operate in. Again we are only expected to report positively when it comes to issues touching on the government and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army. At times we are instructed on what to cover and what to leave out," asserts Dodo. In general the picture of press freedom in South Sudan, painted by these reports, remains gloomy due to many factors such as lack of understanding of the role of the media, an absence of media laws to regulate the sector and protect journalists, insecurity in some states, constant threats from security personnel and powerful individuals, and poor training and pay for journalists, as well as poor communications.

September 2011

## South Sudanese journalists resort to self-censorship for survival

By Paullina Pon

Journalists in South Sudan have resorted to self-censorship as a survival tactic to defy the odds arrayed against them in the troubled media industry. They have to think twice before covering issues such as those touching on matters of corruption, tribal conflict, politics and even security. In most cases journalists do not write openly on these topics because they think by doing so they may risk arrest or even lose their jobs, due to cases where whole media houses have been targeted and threatened with dire consequences. Otieno Ogeda, a seasoned journalist from South Sudan, explains that self-censorship is the only way to go for journalists who want to survive without rubbing the government, security agents and even their bosses up the wrong way. He says that with all the threats from the government, lack of employment and the fear of losing their jobs, journalists know they have to take extra care before writing articles that may annoy the authorities. "In South Sudan a journalist has to think twice before writing certain articles. Journalists are not always sure whether they would annoy their editors who must guard against the closure of their media house by the government," asserts Ogeda. The list of taboo subjects for the media is growing as journalists ponder what the future holds for them. Top on the list of untouchable areas for journalists in South Sudan include corruption in the government and human rights abuses. Reporting about the many tribal conflicts across the country is also regarded as unsafe because the government can view this as incitement. In addition, attacks against, or pressure put on, media houses by powerful individuals often go unreported because journalists writing or airing such stories know they are taking serious risks. Ogeda says that some local journalists have only survived in the profession because they keenly gauge the contents of their news before it sees the light of the day, versus the expected reaction of the targeted audience and even those mentioned in the story. "This is a country emerging from conflict and we have to admit that people are so traumatized, people are yet to understand the role of the media; it is only safe for any journalist to watch what he writes lest he falls on the wrong side of the law which is very not good for anyone", Ogeda advises. Of course, the problem is that journalists are not often clear what the law is when it comes to reporting because the long awaited Media Bill has still not been passed, and therefore most error on the side of caution which increases the amount of self-censorship. The adoption of the Media Bill will hopefully draw clear lines on what is acceptable and what is not, thus offering journalists some legal protection and reducing the need for self-censorship. In some cases, of course, self-censorship is a good thing when done for the right reasons; when a journalist through awareness of their own biases or the sensitivity of a situation is circumspect about the stories they produce for the example. Mr George Garang, the Undersecretary at GoSS Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, admits that sometimes journalists must practice self-censorship. "The media should be guided by the principles of responsibility, honesty and accuracy. What we report should be balanced not to incite and cause problems," he stated. However, there are many times when self-censorship is conducted for the wrong reasons, and keeps important information

from the public or feeds them inaccurate information, which is obviously not in the interest of society in general. "I have seen situations where politicians own media houses and have vested interests in particular issues; they either bribe the media or even demand to know the news content before publications see the light of day. In such cases journalists censor their stories before showing it to their bosses," Ogeda reveals further.

33 year old female journalist Janet Kiden says that most journalists do not write critically because they do not have enough support from their own editors, who denounce them whenever they run into trouble with quoted sources. Kiden says that in such situations she would not want to put her job on the line as she, after all, understands the repercussions, which can include the risk of being fired and detention. "I know of cases where a local journalist was threatened with dire consequences over reports that appeared in his weekly column which suggested that certain powerful persons in the government were involved in corruption. In fact it was the named Minister who ordered the arrest of the journalist. Instead they asked him to tone down his criticism of the young government," asserted Kiden. Charles Yuggu is a Juba based freelance journalist and says that he wouldn't take up any assignment that involves the interviewing of security personnel, particularly the police. "You see, that time The People's Voice asked me to go and source for a story on the establishment of gender reporting desks at police stations, I declined because I knew the consequences," admits the 27 year old reporter. Adding, "those people [read police] are not friendly; instead they would even brand me a spy and lock me up. I just hate covering anything that involves the police, because they do not even open up to the media and might even decide to arrest you on very flimsy grounds." And then, of course, there are a journalist's own prejudices and biases, related perhaps to tribal loyalties, or their religious belief, which can affect what they do and do not write about. This is particularly a problem when the media is at an early stage in its development, as it is in South Sudan, and when there is little formal education or training available for journalists. Juba University does not even have a proper journalism course for example. Yuggu further discloses that he would also not report on certain aspects of his own community's customary laws, however out-dated and bad they can sometimes be for certain members of the community. "My community is Kuku and we have lots of things such as sex and witch craft that are considered taboos to be discussed in public. I would personally not feel comfortable exposing anything about the Kuku people, which I know very well will obviously cause me trouble. In fact I will be viewed as a traitor by my village mates," Yuggu says. With the ghost of unofficial censorship imposed by the authorities continuing to haunt the fragile media sector, as well as the self-censorship practiced by journalists themselves, the future of journalism, and therefore, the future of public information in South Sudan isn't looking bright. In fact, it seems that as journalists begin to become more aware of unspoken red lines; self-censorship, worryingly, may be a major reason for the decline in the number of cases of attacks on the press.

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## Killing the Messenger: attacks on press freedom in South Sudan

By Paul Jimbo



People's Voice editor, Paul Jimbo, & another journalist are escorted away at government function.

Despite the general feeling that all is well in South Sudan with regards to press freedom, the truth is, that the media in the world's youngest nation is under attack. A closer scrutiny of the media situation in the country paints a grim and gloomy picture of press freedom.

"It is a picture of a desperate sector struggling to overcome unending turbulence. It is a sector crying out for the right to access information and disseminate information," says Oliver Modi, Chairperson of the Union of Journalists of South Sudan (UJOSS). Modi observes that due to lack of media laws in South Sudan, journalists have had their cameras or equipment confiscated or damaged by plain-clothed security operatives, who either demand an official permit from the journalists or label them as spies without proof.

David de Dau, the Executive Director of the Agency for Independent Media (AIM) commented, "We have a number of disturbing reports from different parts of South Sudan which are of major concern to us as media, to the people of South Sudan, to the region and indeed to the world as a whole. We have cases where journalists have been arrested, harassed, intimidated, threatened, humiliated, molested, tortured and detained for no clear reason." This trend is worrying stakeholders in the sector.

There is also lack of understanding amongst law enforcement agencies on the role of the media; a situation which has only worsened the state of media freedom, as security agencies continue raiding media houses and harassing journalists with complete impunity. In one of the worst examples of attempts to gag the media in South Sudan, in 2010, security forces in the capital Juba, raided two media houses, arrested personnel and even ordered them to shut their operations. Juba's Bakhta and Liberty FM stations went off air for close to two hours after security forces purportedly dispatched by the Public Security Director's Office, stormed them and ordered their immediate closure.

First to be arrested was Liberty FM's Albino Tokwano, the station's General Manager. Speaking to *The People's Voice*, Mr Tokwano, who vividly recalled the incident said, "They bundled us into their vehicle before driving us to the office of the Director General of Public Security." "They demanded copies of our popular 'Evening Drive' live call-in programme. They alleged that we hosted a senior political figure whose sentiments and utterances presented the SPLM government in a bad light," asserted Mr Tokwano. "When

they released us, they asked us never to host anybody critical of the government or else they promised to permanently shut down our station," he added.

The same day, Bhakita FM's Director, Sister Cecilia, was also arrested and bundled into a police car before being driven to the public security office for interrogation. She was

station remained closed as security agents surrounded the building after switching off our equipment. They however returned back the keys after grilling Sister Cecilia," said Sister Paula. In fact, 2010 as a whole was a bad year for press freedom, witnessing a high number of incidents all over South Sudan. In Bor town of Jonglei state, a

journalist was arrested, harassed and detained for more than three days only to be released without charge. In Unity state, another journalist was arrested, beaten and tortured in detention. In Western Equatoria, a female journalist was intimidated and reportedly sexually abused. In all three cases, according to security intelligence officers, the reporters were suspected of spying. In Eastern Equatoria, a journalist was arrested, harassed and detained for two days. In April 2010, Banifacio Taban Kuich, a colleague, Sister Cecilia, was arrested and beaten before being detained for thirteen days in Upper Nile's Bentiu town. Banifacio was also accused of spying for the Khartoum regime by allegedly pretending to be a journalist. n Lakes state a journalist was taken from his house and locked up after publishing a story that seemed to implicate state authorities in corruption. In other cases from Lakes State, there are many examples of journalists being compelled to broadcast biased information, especially that perceived to be destructive to the establishment's adversaries or favorable to those in powerful positions. The situation this year has not shown any signs of improvement. A Sudan Radio Service

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## Windhoek Anniversary timely as South Sudan struggles with press freedom

By Oliver Modi

The 3<sup>rd</sup> May is the date set aside annually to celebrate World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD). This date was established by the United Nations General Assembly to raise awareness of the importance of freedom of the press and to remind governments of their duty to respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression enshrined under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This year, deep in the African continent, in the fledgling state of Southern Sudan; journalists, media practitioners, government officials, and representatives from international organizations and civil society, gathered in a small hotel room in Juba to join the rest of the world in marking this important occasion. The theme this year of WPFDD – 21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers – held a lot of resonance for South Sudan, as it approached its declaration of independence in July. There was also another reason why this year's WPFDD was particularly relevant to South Sudan, as the world's newest nation struggling to find its feet regarding press freedom, marking as it did the 20th anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration. This declaration is a statement of press freedom principles put together by African newspaper journalists in 1991 at a UNESCO seminar,

"Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press," held in Windhoek, Namibia, in May 1991. It was later endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference and emphasizes the importance of an independent press for democracy, good governance and economic development. The contents of the declaration has been viewed as widely influential, as the first in a series of such declarations around the world and as a crucial affirmation of the international community's commitment to freedom of the press. Unfortunately, in the small hotel room in Juba, many felt that there was little to celebrate about. Addressing the pensively listening gathering, Mr Oliver Modi, Chairperson of the Union of Journalists of South Sudan (UJOSS), stated: "Although the Windhoek Declaration had all the good intentions for a free and independent media, we have nothing to celebrate about, nothing to boast of, and nothing to take pride in, when our journalists are working under such difficult conditions. Our journalists are arrested daily and media houses are raided daily; newspapers are confiscated; while we work under constant threats issued by security agents." According to Mr Modi, this year's celebrations of WPFDD in South Sudan

aimed at reminding the new government to accept the media as a partner in development and to show commitment to press freedom. "We are not waging any war against the government but, we are simply demanding what is rightfully ours. If we gag the media at its nascent stage, I am beginning to sense a lot of danger lying ahead of us. As we come up with the youngest country in the world it must uphold the principles of democracy," he added. Mr Modi further called on the South Sudan Legislative Assembly to speed up passing of the pending media bill to help the media regulate itself. "We prefer to do things the right way but, how do we do this business without any laws in place? What is the motive of delaying the media bill if it means well to all of us?" he asked. The Head of the Committee on Information at the South Sudan Legislative Assembly, the Hon. Joy Kwaje, who was the chief guest at the function, spoke about her struggle to ensure that the media bill was passed. "All of us agreed that we would like to see the media bill passed," she said. The Member of Parliament, however, told journalists not to give up with their work despite the delay of the bill. "That should not actually detour you from playing your role," Kwaje said. Mr Modi challenged the government to state

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# EDITORIAL

## Awaiting concrete action by GOSS on press freedom

By Michael Koma, UJOSS Secretary General

On May 3rd this year, the Union of Journalists of South Sudan (UJOSS) marked World Press Freedom Day in a small hotel room in Juba. May 3<sup>rd</sup> was proclaimed by the United Nations as a day of celebrating and evaluating the fundamental principles of press freedom around the world, as well as defending the media from attacks on their independence and paying tribute to journalists who have lost their lives while trying to do their jobs. In this edition of *The People's Voice*, we celebrate the declaration of South Sudan as a new member of the United Nations family but, also take stock of press freedom in the new nation with articles on examples of attacks on the media, the phenomena of self-censorship by journalists, and World Press Freedom Day, as well as an interview with the Government of South Sudan (GOSS) Minister of Information. In his capacity as GOSS official spokesman, the incumbent caretaker Minister of Information, Dr Barnaba Marial Benjamin, assured a joint meeting of Media Diversity Institute and UJOSS delegates in April that the government would pass the Media Bill into law before the independence declaration on the 9 July – which has not happened. We in UJOSS would like to remind GOSS to fulfill its pledge of supporting press freedom through action. We would like to see the enactment of the long-awaited Media Bill into law as stipulated in the Transitional Constitution of the newest Republic in Africa. The Union is also renewing its call to the government to stop arresting and intimidating journalists. It must protect media freedom to show the rest of the world that it deserved independence. There have been cases where security officials have confiscated newspapers and even arrested journalists. This is unacceptable and must stop if we are to move ahead as a nation. As the 193<sup>rd</sup> member of the United Nations, which includes membership of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), South Sudan is obliged by international agreements to behave in conformity with regard to values promoting democracy, and one of the tenets of democracy is press freedom. It is important to mention here that this special edition of *The People's Voice*, on press freedom, has been sponsored by UNESCO's Communication and Information Programme in the region, among other donors, in order to promote press freedom in South Sudan. Despite the bad blood between the government and the independent media there is room for patching up relations through dialogue. In the past, South Sudan may have had an excuse for not taking action against its officials violating press freedoms but it must act now, having attained independence. As a country, we must comply with global convention in handling the media, freedom of expression and the right to information.

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## Killing the Messenger: attacks on press freedom in South Sudan

journalist was detained by public security in Wau, after he was picked up by plain-clothed security, in May, for taking photographs without permission. The reporter, Mohammed Arkou Ali, was on an official assignment to gather news and programmes for the Darfur News and Information Service. On May 21st, Ali was moved from a detention center outside Wau town where he had been held for thirteen days to the public security office in Wau, from where he was later released after a further five days in detention, after petitions and protests by the management of his radio station.

Also this year, both *The Juba Post* and *The Citizen* newspapers joined the list of media houses that have been attacked. Only a couple of days after the January 9th referendum, Michael Koma, Secretary General of UJOSS, and Chief Editor of *The Juba Post*, one of the most prominent national

papers, was arrested, though quickly released, because of a piece he wrote about irregularities in the affairs of a leading bank.

In April this year, an entire issue of *The Juba Post* was confiscated, and Mr Koma detained once again due to another piece on an interview with a rebel leader, which the government deemed was a threat to national security. Koma explained, "All that I went through was just attempts by certain politicians to threaten and intimidate me to tone down my voice on issues perceived as corruption cases. Some powerful people would not want the media to expose their scandals yet they think journalists can be hoodwinked to cover their ills; this is why I was arrested and even summoned several times." In the same month, journalists from *The Citizen* newspaper were beaten by security forces as they reported on demolition work at

Juba University and then the newspaper's editor Nhial Bol was arrested after reporting on the attacks on his journalists. Following the incidents in April, GoSS Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Dr Barnabas Benjamin Marial, reassured a delegation of Media Diversity Institute and UJOSS officials that the government was keen on promoting press freedom. According to Dr Marial, the reported cases of attacks on the media were merely isolated cases involving errant officers and some civil servants keen on maligning the otherwise good intentions of the young government. The delegation led by MDI's Executive Director, Milica Pesic, and UJOSS's Oliver Modi, had paid a courtesy call on the Minister to raise concerns over continued attacks on the media and the government's perceived reluctance to pass the media bill.

## Windhoek Anniversary timely as South Sudan struggles with press freedom

clearly its position over continued harassment of journalists. "Here in Southern Sudan, UJOSS has serious concerns about the recent arrests and harassment of journalists. This year, journalists from the Citizen newspaper were beaten by security forces as they reported on demolition work at Juba University.

The newspaper's editor Nhial Bol was also arrested after reporting on the attack of his driver and journalist," continued Modi. The union boss further cited last year's raid on both Bakhita Radio and Liberty FM stations which were later threatened with closure by Central Equatoria security agents because they hosted a senior political figure whose sentiments and utterances presented the SPLM Government in a bad light. "The editor of the Juba Post, Michael Koma, was harassed by police after publishing an article which the government deemed was a threat to national security, because he interviewed a rebel leader, while the police confiscated that day's edition of the Juba Post," asserted Modi. Norwegian People's Aid's (NPA) Country Director, Jan Ledang, underscored the role of the media in providing and disseminating information during Sudan's historic elections and South Sudan's referendum.

"Silence kills democracy, the media is the tool that will ensure social, political and economic growth in this

new country. We believe there is no functional society without the media," Ledang stated. In his speech, Richard Korbandi, Chairperson of the Southern Sudan Human Rights Commission urged the media to lead from the front in championing human rights in South Sudan. "This is your role and we will support you in every way possible as long as you achieve this course" Korbandi said. Attending on behalf of the GoSS Minister of Information, Mr Biong, the Director General in the Ministry of Information, called on UJOSS and its partners not to relent in their fight to ensure those in authority understand the role of media in a democratic society.

He called on UJOSS to keep on pressing and reminding the government of its obligations to its people and he cited the 'The People's Voice' as a true living case of UJOSS's efforts to help the government understand ordinary people's concerns, though he was guarded in his choice of language and very selective in his use of words. Mr Biong emphasized that while the government had obligations, so too do the media, particularly with regard to ensuring professionalism amongst its membership. He said that the government was not hell bent on harassing the media but, instead felt that the media had failed to live up to its expectations. "We are not against a free media but, we abhor lack of

professionalism" he stated.

Mr George Garang, the Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, urged the media to embrace honest, responsible and accurate reporting and added, "what we report should be balanced and not incite and cause problems." As the event ended all thoughts turned to whether there will be anything to celebrate at the next WPFD. For now all eyes are on the Ministry of Legal Affairs to redraft the media bill which will later be tabled before the South Sudan Legislative Assembly for adoption or rejection.

However it remains unclear whether, if passed, the media bill will protect journalists or will be translated as a punitive law aimed at gagging the media, and therefore, what the future holds for press freedom in South Sudan, as the fledgling nation and its government stretches its wings. Will the new government go the way of so many regimes in Africa that strangle their media and so clip the wings of the democratic and economic development of their nations, like the oppressive North Sudan authorities, that South Sudan struggled for over 50 years to liberate itself from? Or, will the government learn from those mistakes and adhere to the principles of the Windhoek Declaration and so usher in a bright and prosperous democratic future for its citizens?

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## GoSS Minister of Information's views on Press Freedom in South Sudan

By Paul Jimbo

Before the independence of South Sudan, the then Sudan was synonymous with grabbing local and international news headlines with its ever increasing cases of harassment and intimidation of the media. However, the separation of the two nations has introduced a new dimension to the topical issue of press freedom. Inspired by both the local and international goodwill it currently enjoys following its independence, the government of the new Republic of South Sudan has reaffirmed its commitment to promotion of a free and independent press. Exuding confidence over its resolve to ensure a conducive media environment, the South Sudan government maintains that a lot of positive ground has been covered in improving the working conditions of journalists and the entire media environment. In a candid and exclusive interview with Dr Barnabas Benjamin Marial, the Minister for Information in the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) *The People's Voice* (PV) Editor Paul Jimbo sought the Minister's views on the press freedom situation in the new state.

PV: What is your definition of the term 'Freedom of Press'?

Minister: Freedom of expression is the cornerstone of the democratic process in any society keen on promoting human rights in all aspects of life. Since the days of struggle as the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and now as the government of the Republic of South Sudan, freedom of expression remains one of our major principle positions when it comes to governance. The cornerstone of our constitution is to build a just and democratic state and this cannot be realized without a free and independent press. This is why we are keen on promoting media development as a government because we understand the role it plays. As far as our principles of building a democratic state are concerned, we believe that freedom of expression is the cornerstone of media development in the new state of South Sudan and we are very clear on this. We believe that the media is an important stakeholder in this process. This is why we have drafted the media laws with the input of all stakeholders. Journalists must also feel free to say what they want to say as long as it is within the media laws. The government would like to nurture a smooth democratic process in the new country. This means that the media must win the principle of freedom of expression.

PV: What is your assessment on the press freedom situation in South Sudan?

Minister: You can agree with me that as a government we have not had even our own newspaper since we signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The peace deal signed between the north and south ended over 21 years of civil war that claimed millions of lives in the then Republic of Sudan. I think we are the first government in Africa to do without a government newspaper. We have over 37 of them, church radio stations, civil society radio stations, and we do not even monitor what they say, we do not even have personnel to see what they broadcast, and the government only has a single radio and TV station. This alone is an indication of how we are moving towards ensuring there is truly freedom of press in South Sudan.

PV: Media laws are very important in walking the talk of press freedom; where are we with the media bill of South Sudan?

Minister: Yes we have the media bill currently in parliament; it we definitely be passed; it was taken to the Council of



GoSS Minister for Information Dr Barnabas Benjamin Marial during the interview.

Ministers; we passed it and took it back to parliament but, there were some journalists who said that there were certain chapters which they felt needed to be rectified, so they themselves wrote to the president. That is why the president asked the assembly to withdraw those Bills so that the concerns raised by the journalists could be incorporated. Otherwise they would have been passed along time ago. Now the bill is back at the Ministry of Justice so that the new dimensions as demanded by the journalists are included before being taken back to parliament.

PV: Before South Sudan became independent, Sudan as a country earned itself a bad name, a state keen on muzzling press freedom by gagging the media. Now that the two sides, north and south have separated officially, what is the plan of the South Sudanese government to set records straight that there is a new order of doing things in the new state?

Minister: Absolutely right! We got the bad name because Sudan was one country and one hell bent on fighting the media; harassment was the order of the day and interestingly this happened in the north, places like Darfur and Khartoum. There were journalists killed in the north but, you know that in the history of the SPLM, there is no single journalist who has been killed in the south; show me today if you know of any. I think this is a very good record. Look at the journalists killed in

Afghanistan, in Iraq and all those places where there is conflict, even in certain parts of Africa, including the Republic of Sudan in Khartoum, there are a lot of journalists who have lost their lives but, can you quote me a single journalist killed in Southern Sudan, in a situation where there was war going on for 21 years? Not even one. Is that not a good record? Yes I believe there have been a few incidences that have happened to journalists in the South since the formation of our then interim government where journalists felt they were harassed. What would you expect when you are building institutions, when you are transforming a guerrilla army into a conventional one, and trying to put our judicial system in order? Definitely there are also issues of capacity where some of our security personnel have overstepped their mandate; it must be understood that they are still being trained. The journalists are also undergoing their own training so they must appreciate the situation as it is. You find a journalist that may have committed a traffic offence and when he is fined, he claims that he is being harassed as a journalist. This is the situation here, it is something which will calm down slowly until we find our feet. The fact that our constitution reflects freedom of expression should be something of comfort to our journalists. Now Miraya FM has been thrown out of the Republic of Sudan in Khartoum, where did they seek refuge? South Sudan. And, the following day they resumed full time broadcasting. If there was real media harassment, why would they run here? Is that not a good sign to show that actually South Sudan is media friendly?

PV: Your predecessors in this Ministry often accused the media of overstepping its mandate and even stepping on the feet of the government. How do you interpret this statement?

Minister: Let me tell you Jimbo; today, freedom of expression comes with responsibility and so you know very well what happened in Rwanda; the media caused the situation that led to a massacre that claimed over 800,000 lives; this is because the media abused its freedom. This is also what we are careful about; we do not want our media to fall on to that line. What my predecessors simply meant was to sound a warning to the media that the government remained concerned on the manner and behavior of the media. We cannot allow this [massacres like in Rwanda] to happen here on our watch. The government is a stakeholder as much as the journalists are.

PV: Does the government have any plans to set up a media training institution or academy to boost journalism standards in South Sudan?

Minister: Oh yes indeed, the way I look at this is that one day, many years ahead, when maturity has gained ground in the media, we may not even need to have a Minister for Information in the Republic of South Sudan. That is very possible if we develop smoothly towards freedom of expression in a manner which is in line with democratic principles. The end game of freedom of expression is that journalists themselves must be part and parcel of the very process and be patient in nurturing it; it's a long process and it is my wish indeed, and I hope that the stakeholders appreciate every step towards press freedom.

## UNESCO provides training on post conflict sensitive reporting

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is committed to media development and press freedom in South Sudan. In line with this commitment, UNESCO's Cairo office organized an intensive four-day training workshop for journalists on the topic of conflict-sensitive reporting, in February 2011 in Juba. The aim of the workshop was to equip media practitioners with specific skills and techniques regarded as essential in analyzing conflict and post-conflict related issues in the South Sudan. A total of eighteen journalists, coming from all the ten states of South Sudan attended the course. Dr Margaret Jjuuko, a media consultant from the University of Rwanda, who led the workshop, discussed with the journalists the role that the media plays as society's watchdog. Training modules addressed the issues of self-censorship and hate speech, discussed the importance of balanced reporting as well as application of codes of conduct



Participants of the UNESCO seminar

and a human rights based approach, with the aim of guiding the journalists through the stormy waters of post conflict reporting. "The media has the power to make leaders accountable and

exercise good governance in accordance with the rule of law. It is looked at as an entity that will bring hope in today's society," Dr Jjuuko explained.

Participants particularly found useful discussions on how to balance conflict-sensitive stories by avoiding the use of sensitive language. The workshop also enabled the journalists to better understand various approaches to reporting in a multilingual and multi-cultural environment and the importance of authenticating sources and verifying information. Practical exercises equipped the participants with the skills to identify weaknesses in the representation, construction and framing of conflict sensitive stories in the news media. The media sector in South Sudan remains key to strengthening democracy and nation building efforts in the new society. Training in conflict sensitive reporting is designed to play a positive role towards unity and reconciliation, democracy and human rights, sustainable peace and development.