

**Carlos Cardoso Memorial Lecture  
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**Guerrilla typewriters - fighting for media freedom before and after liberation**

PERHAPS I should start this presentation by posing the question: who or what are the 'guerrilla typewriters'? Why did we need them then and why do we need them now?

I will speak from the heart because I see journalism as both a passion and a calling. Underpinning this passion is an issue fundamental to the rights of all journalists, and all citizens in fact, and that is freedom of expression. So this is not going to be a 'lecture' in the usual sense of the word, but something of a summary of the long road travelled in Africa to get where we are today, and most importantly, a call to action to all of you to be journalists on a mission to excellence and advocacy.

The recently enacted UN Plan on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity is but one of a multitude of similar charters and resolutions and declarations of principles on the issue of freedom of expression that characterise most regions of the world. I can quote incessantly from the pledges and promises of such documents - from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and a host of others, but I risk putting you all to sleep before I've even started. In essence the right to seek and receive news and express opinions is enshrined in international law, regional human rights agreements and national constitutions the world over.

Inextricable from the right to freedom of expression and opinion is the issue of safety. The fact that over 600 journalists have been killed globally in the past decade underscores the urgency of campaigns to ensure the physical safety of journalists, media workers bloggers and citizens who dare to speak their minds in the exercise of this right and to guard against impunity. (1)

Why then, against the background of widespread affirmation of freedom of expression and opinion, is this right continually denied or tested on our continent, to the extent that scores of journalists have lost their lives in pursuit of it? Even with new technologies giving wider access to citizen voices and public opinion than was even thought possible a few decades ago, governments continue to seek new means to challenge the rights they've committed themselves to protecting.

But before I look at the always burning issue of how to secure freedom of expression and what can be done about it that hasn't been done already, allow me to take you back in time to the 'guerrilla typewriters' and in particular, the journalist and former Wits student whose death inspired this memorial lecture.

The man we honour today, Carlos Cardoso, a former student at Wits who was deported back to his home country, exemplifies the era of what were called 'guerrilla typewriters' in southern Africa. Described as "Mozambique's best and most respected journalist", Cardoso's exposés of growing and pervasive corruption resulted in numerous death threats. He had said that he felt safe because no one had tried to carry out the threats, but he spoke too soon. Not long after, on November 22 2000, at the age of 48 he was dead, shot in cold blood. (2)

Cardoso was a journalist of great passion, integrity and commitment, who, because of his journalistic skills and forthright manner, constantly irritated the Frelimo leadership in his country. Jailed, ironically by a man to whom he would later serve as an advisor, late Mozambican President Samora Machel, Cardoso worked for the government press agency, but left media for a brief few years due to frustration with management and what he regarded as poor journalism. Because it was in his blood, Cardoso returned to co-found Mozambique's first independent press co-op, Mediacoop. He was never short of ideas, and I believe he must be credited with taking a bold step into the future of new media by creating the first-of-its kind daily faxed newspaper, Mediafax, in 1992. Despite its popularity, Cardoso later set up (another) faxed newspaper of his own, Metical. With a strong business slant, it soon became self-sustaining, and it campaigned against the World Bank and IMF and an increasingly corrupt political elite, in particular what Cardoso referred to as the 'gangster faction' of Frelimo. In the weeks before his death, he had been researching an expose of the links of senior officials and businessmen to a multi-million bank fraud and subsequent coverup.

Described by a friend, Dave Clemens, as a "crusading editor, dogged investigative journalist, family man, friend and patriot in the best sense of the word", Cardoso had a dream for his beloved Mozambique which was rapidly being dashed by the corruption which invaded the country along with foreign money once the war was over. "It is this corruption", wrote Clemens, "that Carlos Cardoso, in which turned out to be his final years, fought to bring to light - a battle in which he eventually became the casualty". (3)

Like Carlos, hundreds of journalists across Africa and in the world have, over the decades, paid and continue to pay the ultimate price for speaking truth to power.

The same idealism that fuelled Cardoso likewise impelled others on the sub-continent, including myself. My baptism into journalism nearly four decades ago resulted from a burning desire to take on the injustice that was apartheid. What the 'guerrilla typewriters' had in common was that all were unashamedly passionate about asserting their independence and saw journalism as a means to effect change in their respective countries and most faced consequences for their actions.

In the 70s, Africa, and southern Africa in particular, was characterized by what one could term an 'obedient' press, either controlled by governments or at best sympathetic to them. In terms of the albeit commendable aims behind Unesco's New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) - which attempted to redress the north-south news imbalance -

media was managed by African governments, which under guise of promoting 'development journalism', held power and often selected editors and senior staff who were sympathetic to them. What I term the era of 'information ministries' sought to exercise control with dominantly state-owned media, and as most of you are aware, the relics of this system are still with us to lesser or greater degree today as some governments cling onto these in their reluctance to relinquish influence.

The guerrilla typewriters - named so because they were made up of almost exclusively print media - came into being to resist these controls; trying to force the apartheid regime on the one hand, as well as other autocratic African government on the other, to bow to the democratic winds of change on the continent in the dying throes and aftermath of the Cold War in the 80s and 90s. These journalists were exercising their hitherto unrecognised rights to freedom of speech and the press and they found expression in different ways. Combining journalism with activism and advocacy, at The Namibian we campaigned against the inhuman policies and the atrocities which took place under South African apartheid military rule. We also advocated self-determination and independence and support for the implementation of the international settlement plan which finally led to UN sponsored elections and freedom from colonial rule in 1990. All of this came at the cost of attempted assassination, death threats, firebombing of our offices and harassment of staff.

Similarly, brave independent newspapers headed by defiant editors sprang up across the continent to tackle draconian and autocratic governments and the enforcement of censorship through intimidation. A journalist who was released from prison just in time to attend the Windhoek Conference in 1991, Pius Njawe, of Cameroon's *Le Messenger*, described by the International Press Institute as "Cameroon's most beleaguered journalist and one of Africa's most courageous fighters for press freedom", like Cardoso, investigated abuses by the Paul Biya government and the theft of the country's substantial oil revenues by wealthy supporters of the President. Njawe was jailed on multiple occasions, and later tragically died in 2010 in what seemed to be a mysterious car accident in the US. (4)

His words to an IPI interviewer sums up the sentiment behind the 'guerrilla typewriters': "A word can be more powerful than a weapon, and I believe that with the word .. we can build a better world and make happier people ... No one will silence me .. before I achieve what I consider as a mission in my native country, in Africa and, why not, the world". (5)

Kenneth Best of Liberia, Gitobu Imanyara of the Nairobi Law Monthly, Ndimara Tegambwage of Radi, Tanzania, Onesimo Makani-Kabweza of Moto in Zimbabwe, Anton Harber of the Mail and Guardian ... the list goes on. Unfortunately, time will not allow me to list and pay tribute to the many brave journalist pioneers, like Cardoso and Njawe, who were not only prepared, but often did sacrifice their lives for their deep-held beliefs in press freedom and free expression in Africa in the post colonial era.

With lean budgets, small but dedicated staff numbers, running campaigning newspapers and fighting off political pressures, was a [24/7](#) occupation. Apartheid domination of southern Africa also meant restricted travel and movement within the region, means of communication were limited to landline phones, the telex and later the fax machine (if we were lucky). The coincidence of this handful of journalists at newspapers who simultaneously yet independently challenged the status quo in several countries, is still a source of amazement to me. There was

unspoken camaraderie between these editors, some of whom had never met one another. For most it not just a job, but a way of life, a calling, something which in my view still lies at the heart of what journalists should be.

The memory of Carlos Cardoso and many other journalists who suffered and/or paid with their lives for public service journalism, are embodied in the spirit of the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, adopted at a UNESCO conference which I chaired in the Namibian capital on May 3 1991. This was a turning point for African journalism. Finally the 'guerrilla typewriters', brave journalists from Cameroon, Ghana, Zimbabwe, and a host of other African countries, came together in Windhoek - many of us meeting for the first time - to put on paper the clarion call for governments to recognise the importance of an independent and pluralistic press to democracy and good governance.

It is important that young journalists on our continent today appreciate the history and the sacrifice that brought us to that point. African media scored a first for the continent with that same Declaration which threw out the discredited NWICO and affirmed our rights to freedom of the press and independent journalism. Not only did it unequivocally tell governments that the era of wholly state- owned and dominated media, was over, but it also paved the way for recognition, albeit grudging, on the part of the African Union and other regional instruments, for freedom of expression. Even globally, Windhoek set a trend and inspired journalists in other parts of the world to adopt similar declarations for recognition of free and independent media, including the Alma Ata Declaration for the journalists of Central Asia; the Sofia Declaration in former Eastern Europe; Santiago Declaration for Central and South America and the Caribbean; Sanaa'a in Yemen, and so on.

The significance of the Windhoek Declaration was later marked by the UN General Assembly recognising [May 3](#) - the day on which it was adopted - as International Press Freedom Day, yet another milestone for African media.

The 'guerrilla typewriters' certainly helped bring about a new era for media on the continent. While the struggle for freedom of expression will never be completely won as governments continue to pay mere lip service to many of the freedoms to which they claim to subscribe, the Windhoek Declaration at least gave more widespread recognition and acceptance of the need for freedom of expression, as well as impetus to plurality and diversity of the media in Africa. Campaigns in its aftermath included freedom of information and access to information campaigns, codes of ethics, initiatives for media self-regulation and formation and promotion of regional bodies to drive media freedom advocacy.

Passion and idealism got us to this point, and it will take more of the same if we are to guard against the further erosion of these rights in the future.

Journalists across Africa today don't have to take on the same challenges that we did, but fight you will have to. Mainly print media fought for independence and journalistic freedoms, but today there is a multiplicity of more sophisticated media, which, with the advance of new media technologies, make it more difficult for authorities to permanently silence the voices of citizens and journalists alike.

You may think I'm saying that journalists today have it a lot better than we did decades back.

Not so. While we must salute the courage of Cardoso and the past journalistic heroes who put their lives on the line for what they believed in, so too today there are new and daunting challenges for contemporary media. Even with the advance of new media technologies, governments in turn seek new means to repress and suppress voices of criticism and dissent. The internet may make it more difficult to control ideas and information, than, for example, was the case in the heyday of traditional media - where newspapers was simply firebombed or banned and editors jailed. But online surveillance has also given rise to fears of digital safety. It raises strong concerns about exposure and persecution of sources who are whistleblowers but who may avoid surfacing information for fear of electronic identification. While technology has also made it easier for people to share views and information, examples abound of governments which still seek to exercise control over the internet and to silence critical voices. And most importantly, the world, and in particular our continent, has become no safer for those voices despite more widespread recognition for democracy and the rights accompanying it.

Contemporary African journalism has its heroes too. In Ethiopia, Reeyot Alemu is serving a long prison sentence under anti terrorism laws for her critical coverage of government. According to the CPJ, at least 41 African journalists were in jail on World Press Freedom Day this year, imprisoned in direct reprisal for their work. More than 80 journalist murders have gone unsolved in Africa since 1992, and again according to the CPJ, Nigeria and Somalia are among the worst nations in the world in combating deadly, anti-press violence, the 2013 Impunity Index Found.

This past weekend, Somali television journalist, Mohamed (Tima'ade) Mohamed, died after he had been seriously wounded in a shooting on his way home from work. Said blogger Abdiaziz Ibrahim, "Attacks against the press in Somalia are common. Assassinations continue. Few investigations have taken place to find the perpetrators". Although the Somali President issued a strongly worded statement condemning the attack, Ibrahim asked why then security forces routinely fail to capture the killers. Again this illustrates the widespread lack of political will on the part of governments to guarantee safety for journalists and to counter impunity. (6)

In a letter to the Chairperson of the African Union [on May 3](#) this year, the CPJ called "for the release of all journalists imprisoned in Africa and appealed for justice in the murders of journalists killed in the line of duty". "Critical journalists", said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon, "are not criminals, traitors or terrorists". (7)

Journalists continue to die for what they believe in. The question is who's killing them and why should they be forced to suffer for the exercise of their craft. It is no secret that investigative journalism, of the kind Cardoso practised and which led to his death, is the most dangerous of all. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reveals that the beats covered by victims include primarily human rights, politics, war, crime and corruption. So many journalist deaths remain unsolved and impunity is a real problem. While there is no question that investigative journalism continues to be risky business, what better tribute could there be to Cardoso and the many others who have died, suffered and been imprisoned for their beliefs, than to elevate investigative journalism to even greater heights, especially when it comes to the abuse of our continent's resources and spiralling corruption, and to follow up killings of journalists as a critical story. Media need to get out of their nationalistic boxes and expose the death and injustices meted out to other journalists, wherever in Africa this occurs. Unless pressure is put on the

authorities over time, impunity will remain and those 600 journalists in the last decade will have died in vain. This conference is valuable to that end.

Traditional or what is also called 'legacy' media may have been dented by the digital revolution, but it is encouraging to note that a recent South African baseline survey of youth, media and citizenship reveals that most youth still favour legacy media as their main source of news; and that they also trust these media more as sources of information. (8)

A recent Afrobarometer survey on the partnership between free speech and governance revealed that citizens across Africa give generally high marks to national media for revealing government mistakes and corruption, and 71 per cent say the media in their respective countries is either 'somewhat' or 'very effective' in this regard (9).

Given the new technologies and the wider access, in most cases, that this has provided for citizen voices, some would argue that the role of the journalist and traditional is no longer as important as it was back in the days of the 'guerrilla typewriters'. I disagree. I'm not convinced that internet access will be within reach of a majority of Africans in the near future. While the growth of mobile technology on the continent has been huge, it is still primarily used for communication rather than information. Social media such as Twitter and Facebook, used to good effect during the Arab Spring, often remains just that - social - in our part of the world. The huge potential that is the internet, especially as a source of, and facilitating access to information, needs to be put to good use by both media and citizens alike. A conference such as this one will boost skills in the effective use of the Internet to promote investigative journalism. Even with a shift from traditional to digital to varying degrees across the continent, and the rise of citizen reporting, Africa still needs good journalists, perhaps more than ever before. Especially those who have passion for their communities; who dig deeper and commit to ethics and high standards of professionalism in their responsibility to inform. We may have to learn new ways to strengthen our work but the essential task remains the same, and where I come from, this is public service journalism - keeping accountable and close to the people we serve.

Journalists must continue to speak truth to power. The 'guerrilla typewriters' of today, while continuing to cherish the causes of entrenching democracy and human rights, need to invest more in solid investigative and public service journalism which will contribute to people empowerment. Given rising corruption, lack of good governance and resultant shrinking resources for the poor and marginalised on our continent, we have a responsibility, indeed a duty, to continue to expose the abuse.

While the plethora of declarations and principles about protection of freedom of expression and promises to investigate crimes, including attacks on journalists, came too late for Cardoso, lack of political will to implement these pledges continues today. It will be journalists themselves who will need to hold governments, which are obliged "to take effective measures to prevent such attacks and when they occur, to investigate them, punish the perpetrators and ensure victims have access to effective remedies" to account. (10)

Making Africa, and indeed the world, safe for journalists and citizens exercising freedom of expression should be a priority for us all. A participant at World Press Freedom Day in Costa Rica this year, aptly said when asked whether journalists dying on the job was an occupational hazard, an unavoidable price society must pay for good journalism and ultimately the truth:

"The price of journalism should not be more than feeling tired after a long day's work". (11)

The question has been posed - against the background of this changed and dynamic new media so different from where the 'guerrilla typewriters' began - whether there is a need for journalists anymore. With people increasingly finding their own sources of news and information and performing acts of journalism themselves as citizen reporters and bloggers and so on, has journalism as such become an outdated concept? Not in my view. Said Glenn Greenwald, the former Guardian-based reporter behind the Edward Snowden revelations, at the recent Rio conference on investigative journalism: "Journalism isn't dying. It's thriving and just going to other places." (12)

Although there are no typewriters anymore and the struggles of yesteryear are similar yet not the same ones that we face today, the spirit that drove us then should continue to inspire journalists today. Our basic aim, whether we are in print, radio, television, so called traditional media or the new, remains to get as close to the truth as we can. Elevated levels of professionalism and ethics, and yes, accountability, is necessary to 'win back hearts and minds' of the people that we may have lost through disinterest or careless, sloppy journalism. We must remember we are nothing without our readers, viewers and listeners and our responsibility is to them and not to governments, corporate or political or any other power players. While we must continue to insist that our independence is crucial to the fight for free expression and a democratic society. We must aspire to excellence and guard against the debilitating dangers of 'chequebook' journalism and the materialistic culture that is also permeating our societies.

What sometimes appear to be progressive steps forward by a few governments to enact freedom of information laws, are often offset by legislation that seeks to do the contrary. such as, for example, South Africa's controversial Secrecy Bill. This would clearly have a chilling effect on freedom of expression as it would hamper journalistic ability to report on corruption and deter whistleblowers. National security or terrorism concerns are usually the popular guises under which governments seek to curtail freedoms and resist accountability. The media have a clear role to expose proposed measures which are counter-productive to freedom of expression and place them squarely in the public domain.

The West, in particular the US and UK in my view, has lost the moral high ground when it comes to the protection of fundamental freedoms. The recent scandal involving widespread online surveillance on the part of the National Security Agency (NSA), among others, is just one example of measures bound to have a chilling effect on freedom of expression. Western governments too need to be reminded that they too operate within a framework of laws and should desist from misusing anti terror legislation to silence critics. African journalists, as they did with the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration, are presented with the opportunity to once again lead the way against such abuses of freedom of expression and rights to privacy. It is important too that journalists not be uninvolved bystanders who leave the campaigning to non-governmental organisations. We need to rise to the challenge and act in concert to campaign for full recognition of the rights to freedom of expression, journalistic safety and to end impunity and other evils that impact our work and our safety.

In conclusion, while there have been gains over the decades, freedom of expression remains under attack. Journalism, I have always maintained, is not just a job. It is and remains, as I said at the outset, a calling. Hopefully the new cadre of editors and journalists in Africa today will

ensure that the sound of the guerrilla typewriters of old will never really fall silent and that we will again witness, in even greater numbers, the rise of impassioned, committed and professional journalists who still believe in and fight for a better society. Only through guaranteed free expression, without fear or reprisals, can people be truly empowered and our journalism thrive. The power is still in our pens. We should use it wisely and for the peoples' sake.

(1) Introduction to the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, adopted

(2) 'Carlos Cardoso: His tenacious journalism exposed corruption in Mozambique' by Joseph Hanlon, The Guardian, Friday 24 November 2000

(3) Mozambican journalist Carlos Cardoso's suspected killers on trial by Dave Clemens, World Press Review contributing editor, on [www.worldpress.org](http://www.worldpress.org)

(4) IPI International Press Institute [www.freemedia.at/awards/pius-njawe.html](http://www.freemedia.at/awards/pius-njawe.html)

(5) Ibid

(6) Somalia, It's Time For Action by Abdiaziz Abdinuur Ibrahim/CPJ guest blogger [cpj.org/blog/2013/somalia-its-time-for-action.php](http://cpj.org/blog/2013/somalia-its-time-for-action.php)

(7) Beyond Article 19, a Global Press Freedom Charter, by Joel Simon, Executive Director of Committee to Protect Journalists, 2013

(8) In Search of the Holy Grail: Youth media consumption and the construction of citizenship by Lynette Steenveld, published in the Rhodes Journalism Review (33)

(9) Afrobarometer: Policy Brief No. #3 "The Partnership of Free Speech and Good Governance in Africa" by Winnie Mitullah and Paul Kamau (October 2013)

(10) Beyond Article 19, a Global Press Freedom Charter, by Joel Simon, Executive Director of Committee to Protect Journalists, 2013

(11) Journalists' safety key focus for World Press Freedom Day Conference, by Brian Pellot, Index on Censorship, [www.indexoncensorship.org/2013/journalists-safety-key-focus](http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2013/journalists-safety-key-focus)

(12) Interview with Greenwald by Ryan Hicks, titled 'Greenwald decries Western journalism as 'corrupted'', published on website of the Global Investigative Journalism Conference, Rio de Janeiro, October 12-15 October 2013