

SUBMISSION TO NEGOTIATING COUNCIL  
IN RESPECT OF RECENT VIOLENT ATTACKS ON  
JOURNALISTS

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STATEMENT

When a British member of Parliament pointed to the Press Gallery and declared : " Yonder sits the Fourth Estate, more important than them all ", he was hardly exaggerating.

Particularly in South Africa today, the Media are probably the most valuable single vehicle for a successful transition to democracy and this for several reasons :

- 1) It is mainly via the Media that the complexities of the negotiation process can be conveyed to the public.
- 2) The Media play a major role in shaping and determining the mood of the people, in promoting the reconciliation so essential to this nation.
- 3) The Media provide the information and insight necessary for that most important of all qualities : WISDOM.

4) And finally, to emphasize a tragic tendency in this country : While politicians and political parties find it impossible to operate in certain areas, hold political meetings, do door to door canvassing, because of disruptions, hostility, violence - it is mainly via the Media that many people can be informed about significant developments - this maintaining at least a semblance of democratic norms.

There are many " hill " slogans being bandied about today by foolish though dangerous people.

Few of them are as foolhardy as the one that proclaims the " KILLING OF THE MESSENGER " .

As we've seen newsmen are being killed, crippled and wounded in this country.

The question of what can be done to stop these despicable acts, is a complex one.

Here are a few suggestions emanating from discussions held with journalists and other concerned people :

1) Politicians must not only continue to publicly condemn such attacks in the strongest possible terms, but must spread the message on the ground so that every township dweller becomes a protector of newsmen visiting their areas. It must be made clear to those who attack reporters and cameramen, that communities will assist vigorously in hunting down the attackers and handing them over to the authorities.

( The ANC set an excellent example of this recently, when they hunted down some of those who had attacked two SABC Newsmen.)

2) It is advisable for newsmen not to simply barge into a potentially dangerous area - although often this is like trying to persuade a dog not to bark. Nevertheless, it would be a good thing for them to first consult the police and political parties in the area and inform them of their intended presence. It is also advisable not to send into the township those who are not " township wise ". Specialisation in township reporting is essential.

3) However, as the surprise element is the attackers main weapon, attention should also be given to more drastic measures. Like the Red Cross, few newsmen are prepared to carry weapons.

For obvious reasons, direct protection by the police is not advised, but there can be no objections to private security companies providing protection to journalists in dangerous areas.

4) Again as with the Red Cross, journalists and their vehicles should carry identification insignia.

The word " PRESS " should be prominently displayed on the vehicles and on the clothing of journalists.

This should be a UNIFORM sign available to all journalists, operating in dangerous areas. It should not indicate for what organization the journalist works.

The above are just a few suggestions of what could be done.

It's highly likely that there are many more.

However this is a problem, the solution to which we must vigorously pursue.

Cynics, ( often quite rightly ) accuse Africans of regarding their political opponents as enemies and of treating them as such.

Journalists are not and should not be the enemies of the people. They are the essential messengers.

We do not want to estrange them from us, or make it difficult, or impossible for them to do their work properly.

Someone once likened press freedom in Africa to " muffled drums ".

In South Africa we want journalists to be able to project a clear message that will be beneficial to us all.

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