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CALLS FOR ACTION TO STOP ATTACKS ON KZN JOURNALISTS

19 JUNE 2018

The recent spate of attacks on journalists in KwaZulu-Natal received strong condemnation from those who attended the Durban Dialogues multi-stakeholder Media Freedom Round Table held at the Durban ICC today. Durban Dialogues © is a platform that promotes dialogue and discussion in the region.

Title editors from key media institutions, journalists and representatives of the SA National Editors' Forum (SANEF) and SA Freelancer's Association (SAFREA) said the attacks against journalists must stop.

They said the safety of journalists was core to upholding media freedom as enshrined and protected in the South African Constitution. It was critically important for journalists to report without fear or favour and they needed the protection of the relevant authorities including police, the IEC and the community, in order to do their work.

In recent months journalists in the region have come under attack at service delivery protests and been verbally and physically abused and manhandled by police at crime scenes. Some received threatening phone calls from certain political leaders and were intimidated by veterans and supporters at the recent court trial of former President Jacob Zuma, and at recent political rallies and gatherings.

Journalists also experienced cyber-attacks and threats via social media, forcing them to close their social media accounts.

Journalists and editors in the region are concerned that if left unchecked the attacks on journalists are likely to become a trend, especially in the run up to the 2019 Elections.

The meeting resolved that all transgressions against journalists will be reported to the highest level and all complaints will be documented until resolved.

The following resolutions were taken:

- For the IEC to monitor the situation and call on political parties to adhere to the Code of Conduct in the Electoral Act that allows journalists to cover the elections freely and without intimidation.
- A call on President Cyril Ramaphosa to intervene in the attacks on journalists and condemn it as part of “his new dawn” agenda.
- The setting up of a quick response system where journalists can report all transgressions without fear or intimidation by calling 0823794957.
- The roll out of Safety Workshops for journalists in the form of workshops and seminars as well as safety coaching sessions in the newsrooms.
- The identification of key trauma counsellors who will be on 24-hour standby to assist and support journalists in trouble.
- A strategy to deepen public understanding of the crucial role a free media plays in a democratic society.

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