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**Reporters Without Borders**

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**Evidence of Reporters Without Borders, an NGO with special consultative status, about  
press freedom in SOUTH AFRICA**

**Press freedom**

The press freedom situation in South Africa is satisfactory and comparable to that prevailing in most western European countries. The problems affecting the South African press stem for the most part from controversial court decisions (such as a ban on publishing details of an investigation into embezzlement within the ruling ANC or a ban on reprinting Mohammed cartoons in response to a complaint by the Muslim community), challenges to the principle of confidentiality of journalists' sources, or the acquisition of mass media by political or business leaders.

Media diversity is real and press legislation is democratic in essence. Access to information is, however, still a problem in some provinces, where local governments are sometimes reluctant to provide the public with evidence of their mismanagement.

**Government efforts to improve the situation**

Aside from deferring parliamentary consideration of a controversial proposed amendment to the Film and Publication Act, the government has not take any particular measures to address the problems of the press.

**Cooperation with NGOs**

Local and international NGOs do not complain of a lack of cooperation from the South

African authorities. The views of NGOs are widely reported in the press and the government tends to pay attention to them. No major obstacle to cooperation has been noted.

### **Recommendations**

South Africa's political class should be encouraged to be more tolerant of press criticism. A degree of hostility (threats to sue, occasional violent language and attempts to manipulate journalists) has been noted among leaders of the ruling party. And what South Africa does can be used as an example by authoritarian regimes in the region for cracking down on the press in their own countries. A culture of tolerance and verbal conflict resolution needs to be fostered by reinforcing mediation tools (regulatory bodies, trade unions and monitoring groups) and the laws protecting press "privileges" (confidentiality of sources, internal self-management of media abuses and prioritisation of mediation in disputes with society).

### **Methods used**

The material in this update was gathered and checked by Reporters Without Borders, which has a worldwide network of correspondents (in 130 countries) and partner organisations (in about 20).

Journalists in some countries can be sent to prison for several years just for a word or a photo that offends. Jailing or killing a journalist eliminates a vital witness and threatens the right of each of us to be kept informed. Reporters Without Borders has been fighting day-by-day for press freedom since it was founded in 1985.

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