

IFJ and FAJ Hold Conference on the Welfare of African Journalists in Nigeria

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and its African regional group, the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) foundation held a two day conference on the Welfare of African journalists in the Nigerian capital, Abuja from 20- 21 July 2011.

The Conference, under the theme: “*The Fruit of our Labour: A New Agenda for Improving Conditions of Journalists in Africa*”, was attended by the IFJ President Jim Boumelha and IFJ Secretary General Elisabeth Costa who joined about 30 journalists leaders across the continent. It highlighted the poor working conditions of African journalists which were described as “appalling and precarious.”

Speaking at the opening ceremony, FAJ President Omar Faruk Osman said that the majority of working journalists in Africa have little or no recourse when their rights are violated.

“They have no way to improve their wages and workplace conditions. Year after year, working journalists who are union members are fired, arrested and attacked for exercising their legal right to free association and their right to organize,” he said .

Faruk added that while most journalists are working in atrocious conditions, women journalists are relegated to low wages, low skilled and dangerous jobs while retaining the primary responsibility for the care and survival of their families. “The solutions to these problems lie in our hands and we must find ways to improve the working conditions of journalists in Africa,” he emphasized.

In his address, IFJ President Jim Boumelha told welcomed the fact that the conference focused solely on journalists, their working conditions, social rights and their future.

“The essence of building strong trade unions is to defend the rights and welfare of the members and where unions are lacking or weak, the fundamental rights of journalists’ workers are easily violated,” he said.

In the same vein, IFJ Secretary General, Elisabeth Costa, said that the precarious working conditions of journalists are not only unique to Africa, but common across the world. She stressed that there is need to strengthen our solidarity network to be able to improve the working conditions of journalists.

“The IFJ is fully committed to helping its affiliates in Africa to organise and work collectively.”

The Resident Representative of FES in Nigeria, Thomas Mattig, said that the working conditions of journalists and media workers across the continent are dire. “Many journalists work under precarious working conditions, they have no or almost no social security, no access to collective bargaining mechanisms and often they do not have a work contract or a regular salary.” The contrast, he said, is striking between the importance role the media play in the democracy process and the conditions under which journalists work. He denounced the profound disregard for the importance of free media.

At the end of the two day workshop, a Declaration was issued by FAJ committing the Federation to launch a campaign to improve the conditions of service of journalists and media workers in the media industry in Africa as well as to fight for the labourrights of journalists and other media workers as the fundamental basis of social justice, human rights and democracy.