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**Campaign
for Free
Expression**

Reject Botswana Criminal Procedure Bill, a major threat to media freedom

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The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) is deeply concerned about the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Bill that is being rushed through the Botswana Parliament, and which will – if passed – have a serious impact on media freedom.

CFE is working with the Botswana Editors' Forum, the Southern Africa Editors' Forum, the Press Council of Botswana, the Media Institute of SA (Misa) and others to urge the Botswana government to give further consideration to this Bill and open it up for public debate and consultation.

The Botswana Government published the Bill just a week ago and has indicated that it intends to have it passed and signed into law this week. The Bill gives the authority powers to search without warrants or judicial oversight, including computers and phones. It also allows for the interception of communications for up to 14 days without a warrant if authorized by the head of an investigative authority to probe or prevent offences.

Managers at companies that do not install hardware or software to enable interception or provide decryption keys can be jailed for up to six years.

This endangers journalists' sources and subjects them to chilling surveillance, which will have a major impact on their ability to do their work.

Jovial Rantao, chairperson of the African Editors' Forum, described the Bill as “the worst piece of legislation to have emerged in Botswana, the Southern African region and the rest of the continent in recent history”.

“It is not clear why they are rushing this Bill through with such haste, but it is very worrying,” said Anton Harber, CFE executive director. “We ask that they slow down and give proper consideration to the impact of the Bill on the country and the region. It must be rejected in its current form.”

*The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to protecting and expanding the right to free expression for ALL, and enabling EVERYONE to exercise this right to the full, whether it by speaking out, by protesting, by revealing information, by blowing the whistle on wrong-doing, by arguing, debating, writing, painting, composing or just by shouting out an opinion.

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