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## News

# Media defence seminar coming next week

Friday, October 27, 2023



Nicholas Mokwena

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Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) has partnered with Botswana Editors' Forum (BEF) and INK Centre for Investigative Journalism to host a Media Defence Seminar on October 31st, 2023, with support from Media Defence London.

The Project Manager, Hanifa Manda stated this week that the meeting will gather journalists and media practitioners from various publications and stations, and citizen journalists to analyse the environment of escalating legal cases against journalists, probe the underlying causes, and propose strategies to foster regional collaboration to safeguard press freedom and protect journalists in Botswana and beyond.

Manda said strengthening media defence is critical for Botswana now as the country is about to hold elections. She noted that freedom of expression and access to information are key tenets of democracy and for Botswana to hold free and fair elections in 2024, an independent media is crucial.

"Many journalists and media houses in Botswana today are facing charges of defamation after publishing articles of public interest, exposing corruption and wrongdoing by influential people. A lot of these cases have the characteristics of being Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPP) cases, calculated to intimidate and frustrate journalists and media houses rather than achieve justice.

"Publications facing defamation lawsuits include, The Voice, Sunday Standard, The Patriot on Sunday, Mmegi, Botswana Guardian, Weekend Post, Business Weekly & Review and several independent journalists," she said.

According to the project manager, the growing number of these cases against journalists and publications is particularly worrying as it signifies a downward trend in fundamental freedoms in a country that has long been recognised as a stable democracy in the region and indeed on the continent.

The intimidation and harassment of journalists can hinder diverse voices and limit the spread of information from reaching a wider audience. This imbalance, she observed, can undermine fair electoral competition and limit the ability of citizens to access a diverse range of political information, including accessing credible

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BWP	P1.00
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USD	\$0.07
GBP	£0.06
CNY	¥0.54
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legislation, media self-regulation, and how other relevant regulations impact journalists and publications,” Manda said. She explained that the meeting is a precursor to the inauguration of an annual Freedom of Expression Summit that CFE and its partners seek to establish, starting next year in 2024 to prepare a level electoral playing field.

“Botswana needs a political culture that promotes tolerance, respect for diverse opinions, and constructive dialogue among citizens. Addressing media intimidation can contribute to an open environment that fosters open communication and encourages the participation of all citizens,” she added.

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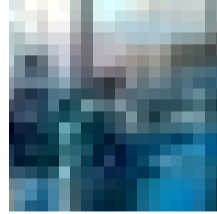
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