



The start of a new year in our household brings with it a rather frantic return to school and work. In an effort at organisation, I write my children's weekly schedules — school timetables and extramural activities — on a blackboard in our kitchen. And, so that it isn't entirely mundane, I also add what I think should be our collective goals for the year.

For the past two years, these have come from the graphic edition of Timothy Snyder's book, *On Tyranny*. It offers twenty lessons from the twentieth century on surviving and resisting authoritarianism. One of those now chalked up for 2026 is this: "Believe in truth." I promise that in other respects I am a more fun mom!

Snyder explains the importance of this prescription as follows: "To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis upon which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is spectacle. The biggest wallet pays for the most blinding lights." Even if, for my children right now, this all sounds a bit like "blah, blah, blah", I'm hopeful that someday they'll come to recognise the importance of this idea.

For us at the Campaign for Free Expression, it has to lie at the heart of what we do. By supporting investigative journalists and whistleblowers in their pursuit of truth, we aim to help promote accountable and improved governance. By supporting academics and scientists, we aim to help advance knowledge and development. By supporting ordinary people in their pursuit of the truth, we aim to help foster informed,

reasonable debate about the kind of society we want to live in.

But we also have to reckon honestly with the moment we are in. Globally — and very keenly here in South Africa — the language of “free expression” is increasingly being misused to shield the abuse of new technologies, including their instrumentalisation for coordinated disinformation and attack. In this environment, so-called free-expression absolutism can become not a defence of truth, but a mechanism for its suppression.

Recognising this tension will shape CFE’s work in the year ahead. We will continue to defend journalists like Thomo Nkgadima, silenced through abusive protection orders; artists like Gabrielle Goliath, whose artistic creativity is made contingent on ministerial whim; and civil-society organisations unjustifiably gagged for responsibly doing their work. At the same time, we will work carefully and conscientiously to help secure frameworks — including new laws — that ensure digital technologies do not impede our search for truth, but rather help to unleash it.

Wishing you all the very best for the year ahead and that, despite its bewildering start, 2026 brings us to a better, freer South Africa and world.

Nicole Fritz

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## ***A New Year and a New Team***

We are delighted to begin the year by welcoming new colleagues to CFE.

Ezekiel Kekana joins CFE as Research Officer and Head of Communications. Ezekiel brings with him a strong background in research, writing and strategic communications, with experience spanning media, civil society and public-interest advocacy. His work reflects a deep commitment to constitutional values and to making complex policy and legal issues accessible to a wider public — strengths that will be central to CFE’s work in the year ahead.

He is joined by Atang Matiea, who will be supporting CFE’s communications work. Atang brings valuable experience in digital communications and content support, and will play an important role in strengthening our public engagement and outreach.

Ella Morrison also joins CFE as intern. Ella has a keen interest in free expression, democracy and social justice, and will be supporting our research and communications work over the coming months.



Ezekiel Kekana



Atang Matiea



Ella Morrison

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## ***Defending Artistic Freedom and Constitutional Governance***

Last week, CFE coordinated a collective civil-society intervention urging the President to intervene following Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture, Gayton McKenzie's effective collapse of South Africa's participation in the Venice Biennale. The Minister's actions, which undermined an independent curatorial process and threaten withdrawal of South Africa's pavilion, raise serious concerns about executive overreach, artistic freedom, and constitutional governance.

Together with a broad coalition of civil-society organisations, we addressed the President directly, calling for Cabinet-level intervention to safeguard artistic expression and the integrity of South Africa's international cultural engagements. You can view the letter [here](#). CFE also [issued a public media statement setting out why this matters](#) — not only for artists, but for the rule of law and the protection of

free expression more broadly.

This intervention reflects CFE's ongoing commitment to defending artistic freedom against political interference, and to ensuring that constitutional principles are upheld in practice, not only in theory.



Image by: Department of Sport, Arts and Culture [Facebook Page]

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***For Highlights of our Work in 2025,  
Please See our Most Recent Annual  
Report***



# Campaign for Free Expression 2025 Annual Report



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*The Campaign for Free Expression 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 be 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 your opinion.*

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