

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)

[View this email in your browser](#)



Newsletter – July 2026

Foreword

In anticipation of the local government elections later this year, the Electoral Commission has invited comment on a draft Electoral Code of Conduct Countering Disinformation. As currently drafted it holds out the prospect that political actors might earn custodial sentences of up to ten years imprisonment for disseminating false information, knowing it to be false or without reasonable grounds to believe in its truth, with the intention of disrupting or preventing an election or in order to influence the conduct or outcome of an election. [Read More](#)

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)

firstthursdays
presents

WOMEN vs. THE DIGITAL MACHINE



featuring



Redi Tlhabi
Qaanitah Hunter
Karyn Maughan

Three women shaping South Africa's public conversation, discuss navigating digital hostility while remaining visible, credible and heard

**THURSDAY, 6 AUG | 18H00 | WEWORK, THE LINK,
173 OXFORD RD, ROSEBANK**



Upcoming Event: Women vs The Digital Machine

On 6 August 2026, CFE, together with the Campaign for Digital Ethics (CODE) and Moxii Africa, will host Women vs Digital Machine, a roundtable bringing together some of South Africa's leading women journalists and public commentators to discuss the realities of participating in digital public life.

women have developed for maintaining their visibility, protecting themselves against coordinated harassment and intimidation, and continuing to contribute confidently to public debate.

At a time when online abuse is increasingly used to silence women who speak publicly on issues of political and social importance, the event will ask what it takes not merely to endure the digital onslaught, but to ensure that women's voices continue to be heard. It forms part of CFE's ongoing work to promote a digital public sphere that is open, pluralistic and genuinely accessible to everyone.

Click on this link to claim your free ticket

Free Ticket



[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)

Image by: Gabriel Shamu

Marking World Press Freedom Day After RightsCon Cancellation

On 5 May 2026, the Campaign for Free Expression (CFE), together with the Campaign for Digital Ethics (CODE) and Moxii Africa (formerly Media Monitoring Africa), hosted a World Press Freedom Day event in Rosebank, Johannesburg.

The event followed the Zambian government's last-minute cancellation of RightsCon 2026, reportedly after pressure from the Chinese government. The world's largest gathering focused on digital rights, RightsCon was due to take place in Lusaka – the first time it would have been hosted on African soil.

In response, CFE, CODE and Moxii Africa moved quickly to bring together journalists, freedom of expression advocates and human rights defenders. The gathering provided an opportunity to mark World Press Freedom Day while confronting the wider implications of the RightsCon cancellation for freedom of expression and human rights across the continent.

Four panel discussions tackled some of the most pressing threats to free expression today: attacks on journalists and independent media, the weaponisation of the law, Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), and the growing use of gag orders to silence critical voices.

Countering Xenophobia Ahead of 30 June

With the threatened 30 June “shutdown” looming and anti-migrant mobilisation escalating, CFE joined CODE, Moxii Africa, the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and the Justice and Activism Hub to convene a Counter-Xenophobia Hackathon in Johannesburg on 28–29 June.

For 20 intensive hours, researchers, journalists, civil society organisations, digital analysts and other experts worked together to understand how xenophobic mobilisation was spreading online and to develop practical responses. Participants

rapid response.

The hackathon reflected a simple imperative: when digital platforms are being used to mobilise hatred, target vulnerable communities and intimidate journalists, civil society cannot afford simply to watch from the sidelines.



Image by: epthinktank.eu

What Can South Africa Learn from Europe's Digital Services Act?

In July, CFE Executive Director Nicole Fritz and media lawyer Justine Limpitlaw travelled to Berlin and Brussels to investigate one of the world's most ambitious attempts to hold major digital platforms to account: the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA).

Supported by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Media Programme, the research trip provided an opportunity to engage directly with researchers, civil society organisations, policymakers and others working with – and scrutinising – the DSA.

Discussions explored some of the questions increasingly confronting South Africa: How do you build a regulator capable of taking on the world's largest technology companies? How can platforms be required to provide meaningful transparency about their systems? What access should researchers have to platform data? How should systemic risks and online advertising be regulated?

The lessons from Europe will feed into CFE's ongoing work on what an effective, rights-respecting framework for platform accountability might look like in South Africa – one grounded in our own constitutional and regulatory context.

CFE Submits Comments on Draft Electoral Code of Conduct

Earlier this week, CFE, together with the Campaign on Digital Ethics (CODE), made detailed submissions on the Electoral Commission's draft Electoral Code of Conduct Countering Disinformation, which proposes new measures to address false information, coordinated manipulation and other online conduct capable of undermining free and fair elections.

Our submissions welcomed the Commission's recognition that the integrity of elections increasingly depends on addressing online harms and that digital platforms have become central to contemporary political campaigning. At the same time, our submissions emphasised that efforts to counter disinformation must remain firmly rooted in constitutional protections for freedom of expression and political participation.

Among other recommendations, we proposed strengthening transparency requirements for online political advertising, establishing a multi-stakeholder Election Platform Forum to facilitate cooperation between the Electoral Commission, digital platforms and civil society during election periods, and improving mechanisms for public accountability and oversight.

The Electoral Commission is expected to consider submissions before publishing a final version of the Code ahead of the 2026 local government elections.

Read the full Submission [here](#).

Litigation Update

Written Judgment Finally Delivered in Thomo Nkgadima Matter

On 8 June 2026, the Praktiseer Magistrate's Court finally delivered its written judgment in the protection order matter involving freelance journalist Thomo Nkgadima.

The court had already set aside the protection order in an oral judgment on 18 November 2025, but Nkgadima waited months for the written reasons. Following interventions by the Public Protectors' office, the judgment was ultimately released, bringing the matter to a close.

Nkgadima was arrested in 2023 after the Mayor of the Fetakgomo Tubatse Local Municipality, Eddie Maila, laid charges of trespassing and intimidation against him. Nkgadima had been photographing the mayor's home while investigating

With CFE's intervention and the assistance of instructed attorneys, the protection order was ultimately set aside. The case is an important reminder of the risks faced by journalists working at local level – and of the potential for legal processes to be used to obstruct and intimidate those pursuing stories in the public interest.

Read the full written judgment [here](#).

CFE Welcomes More Staff Members

CFE is delighted to welcome three new members to the team.

Chris Oxtoby joins CFE as a Research Consultant. An independent legal consultant and adjunct senior lecturer in the Department of Public Law at the University of Cape Town, Chris works on judicial appointments and conduct, constitutionalism and the rule of law, and freedom of expression. His work has included contributing to the development of the Lilongwe Principles and Guidelines on the Selection and Appointment of Judicial Officers and monitoring the South African Judicial Service Commission. He holds a BSocSci and LLB (cum laude) from UCT and an LLM from New York University, and is an admitted attorney of the High Court of South Africa (non-practising roll).

Nkanyiso Ngqulunga joins CFE as Legal Researcher. He holds a BCom Law and LLB and brings experience in competition law, including work on excessive pricing, dynamic pricing algorithms and public-interest considerations in mergers. Nkanyiso has also consulted for non-governmental organisations on advocacy and research, including assisting with intervention applications before the Competition Tribunal.

Sophia Welz designs and manages community programmes for the Campaign for Free Expression, building events and campaigns that make democratic values tangible in everyday spaces. She brings 20 years of experience developing arts organisations, cultural programmes and live events across South Africa and internationally, including over a decade as Managing Director of the South African National Youth Orchestra Foundation. Her work spans the full spectrum of South Africa's performing arts landscape, from headline festival productions to grassroots activations, and has included concerts featuring Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Barbara Hendricks, as well as sold-out tours with Grammy Award-winning artists. Alongside this, she has worked in arts advocacy and led campaigns that use culture to counter social division. She has chaired the Brixton Community Forum since 2016, where her work has ranged from co-founding the Brixton Light Festival to building relations between the African Reclaimers Organisation and the local community to secure recognition and support for waste reclaimers.

[Subscribe](#)

[Past Issues](#)

[Translate ▼](#)



Chris Oxtoby



Nkanyiso Ngqulunga

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)

Sophie Welz

CFE in the Media

- Podcast Interview: Can the Constitution Still Save South Africa? [Watch Here](#)
- Op-Ed: Zambia's RightsCon cancellation reveals who really controls Africa's digital future [Read More](#)
- Op-Ed: Does anti-foreigner hatred pay? Do digital platforms profit? [Read More](#)
- Op-Ed: Media freedom is on trial in Zimbabwe, and Faith Zaba is its face [Read More](#)



[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)

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.

Your choice to receive our newsletter

The Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) looks to implement the constitutional right to privacy by safeguarding individuals' personal information and at the same time protecting the flow of information.

The act outlaws any form of electronic communication unless the receiver has given their consent. A receiver can only be approached once to obtain such consent. Should you wish to be removed from this mailing list click [here](#). If you choose to remain it will be presumed that you have agreed to be part of this mailing list.

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).