



CFE condemns attacks on journalists and demands urgent action to protect reporting

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The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) condemns the threats against News24 investigative journalist Khaya Koko and the physical attacks on GroundUp journalists covering anti-immigrant mobilisation in Durban and Pretoria which have occurred in recent days. These attacks endanger journalists and undermine the public's ability to scrutinise those who seek power and influence.

Koko received numerous threatening calls and messages after March and March founder Jacinta Ngobese-Zuma published a screenshot on Facebook displaying his telephone number. He had approached her for comment on allegations concerning state contracts involving her and her husband. Seeking that response was an essential part of fair reporting. It should never expose a journalist to threats of violence or death.

GroundUp has reported that its journalists were pushed, grabbed, kicked and prodded with sticks while covering Thursday's violence in Durban. Its reporter Seth Thorne was subsequently slapped and had his phone seized while reporting in Pretoria. It should go without saying that physical violence against reporters is unacceptable. So too the attempts to prevent them from documenting violence: these obstruct the evidence through which the public can understand what happened and demand accountability.

"These attacks carry a message to every journalist: ask questions about us, or show the public what we are doing, and you risk becoming a target yourself," said CFE executive director Nicole Fritz. "That intimidation reaches beyond the individual reporter. It threatens everyone's ability to obtain information about people and movements seeking to shape our public life."

CFE stands with Koko, Thorne and all journalists subjected to these attacks. We join SANEF and the Committee to Protect Journalists in calling for urgent protection and credible investigations.

Specifically, we call on:

SAPS to assess and respond urgently to the threats against Koko, investigate the assaults on journalists, and pursue those responsible on the evidence. Journalists covering further demonstrations must be able to work safely.

Ngobese-Zuma and the leadership of the groups involved to unequivocally condemn threats and assaults, instruct their supporters to stop harassing journalists, and make clear that scrutiny of their activities is legitimate.

Meta to act promptly on reported threats and disclosures of personal information that expose journalists to harm, while preserving relevant evidence for lawful investigation.

Political leaders and public officials to defend journalists' right to report and condemn intimidation without qualification.

As South Africa approaches local government elections, journalists must be able to investigate public spending, test political claims and document the conduct of those seeking public support. Voters cannot make informed choices if reporters are threatened into silence.

Freedom of expression protects robust disagreement, criticism and peaceful protest. It does not provide a licence to assault reporters or threaten their lives. The state must act now to ensure that intimidation does not determine what the public gets to know.

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