

Free African Media: A dream we should all work to fulfil



By Branko Brkic: [@brankobrkic](#)

8 Feb 2011

As we chronicle how the brave people of Egypt and Tunisia fight to win their basic freedoms for the first time, the rest of Africa looks to be sliding back into the ever-tightening rule of Big Men. The question is, what will we do about it? What will we do to make sure Free African Media is a reality?

Dear reader,

I want to talk to you about a project that we at *The Daily Maverick* are launching today, Free African Media. But before I get to the project itself, there's a confession I have to make, and it is, I believe, a confession that just about every South African editor should make. Let me explain:

Since 1994, South Africa had enjoyed this incredible gift of practically unlimited freedom of expression. So much so, that we took it almost for granted. With the exception of Zimbabwe, and maybe Swaziland, we limited our reporting on issues of media freedom in Africa. Well, we limited ourselves to reporting, and not very often. And while we were properly outraged by what Mugabe's regime did to his own people and Zimbabwean media, and some of us are also very unhappy about the increasing suppression of dissent in Swaziland, the troubles the rest of African media were going through were mostly reported as a fact only. Not much outrage, not much action.

But as Bob Dylan said long ago, "The times they are a 'changin'". And the South African media has finally heard the wake-up alarm.

For us, it all changed when we finally found ourselves having to defend what we considered inalienable rights: Freedom of expression and access to information. The details of our conflict are freely available on the Internet, but let's just sum it up by saying that the ANC, South Africa's ruling party, is intent on pushing the Protection of Information Bill through Parliament that would give broad powers to tens of thousands of government and government-aligned people to classify information and to rule on what the media should and should not report on. I don't think I need to especially explain how devastating the POI would have been for the budding democracy that SA still is.

Parliament also wants to create a so-called Media Appeals Tribunal, which is another lovely idea that apartheid parliament tried to implement - unsuccessfully. MAT would be a statutory body that would eventually rule on quality and desirability of journalists and their publications. The rationale is that the ANC would like to protect a poor people from the monstrous media, but we all know that it is really about mighty and powerful people who are pissed off with SA media's meddling in their affairs. (Which, for the record, we have no problems with, as long as those affairs are legal and ethical.)

So we found ourselves in this situation and we're fighting it, with all we have. Together with civil society and international organisations, we are fighting these attempts to bring about the end of Freedom of Expression in South Africa.

But then we looked at the rest of Africa and realised it would be great to start an Africa-wide conversation about freedom of expression and quality of our media. And we call it: Free African Media.

With free, quality media and freedom of expression under attack from just about every corner of African reality, it becomes more and more obvious that a more concentrated, Africa-wide effort is needed to help the fight. We, at The Daily Maverick are launching today a 30-day online publication, Free African Media; the publication that will function as a platform dedicated to freedom of expression throughout the continent, as well as to helping improve the overall quality of reporting, analysis and opinion on the continent. We are hoping Free African Media's 30-day trial will prove so successful that we will be able to make it a permanent project.

Our vision

We firmly believe that the mission and the success of any publication depends on the quality of the articles published, seriousness of the editorial team's dedication to freedom of expression and media quality and the support by a well-established network of contributors and supporters. We believe the thinking and design behind Free African Media need to draw heavily from the philosophy and experience gained by [The Daily Maverick](#) team over the years:

- The only way we will succeed in achieving our ideals is a relentless pursuit of quality,
- The publication's first goal is to be read; almost no-one will read dry articles and policy statements, no matter how politically correct they may be. And Free African Media would fail its mission if nobody wanted to read it.
- Treat your readers as grown-ups. They hate patronising.
- Always be half-a-step ahead of the reader. If we're at the same level, the reader doesn't need us. If we're a full step ahead, the reader will not understand us.

Why Free African Media?

Because we, the media, need to know and we need to talk. Often we forget to apply to ourselves the basic reason for our existence in our own countries: To inform people, to get them to think, to make their lives better, to help them make connections between events and people. Somehow, we forget that we also need to be informed, motivated, inspired or awed by someone's courage and craft, or become better journalists just by knowing what others like us are doing. The time is now for a concept like Free African Media to assume a central role in the continent-wide effort to defend and improve free media organisations, be they print, broadcast or online.

Free African Media will be the one place where every media person from 54, soon 55, countries can have access to thinkers and reporters from the rest of the continent. Free African Media will be the platform for the exchange of ideas and a place to plan new efforts. The place where they would feel at home, the place they would want to come back to every day. The place where we do not feel alone.

But, to do all this, we need your help. We need you to tell us about your country's media environment and your daily fights, successes, desperation and thrills. We need you to contribute to our Free African Media effort. We need you to stoke the fires of the African media's imagination.

Technology has finally provided us with the right tools. Now it is our turn to use them and help make Africa a much better place than it is now. And in any vision of a bold future, there is always a central space for vibrant and free media. Let's make it happen.

ABOUT BRANKO BRKIC: @BRANKOBRKIC

Branko Brkic is the founder and editor of The Daily Maverick. He has edited magazines on business and politics, technology, and wildlife and published fiction and non-fiction books,

most of them in Serbian. Email him at branko@thedailymaverick.co.za and follow him on Twitter at [@BrankoBrkic](https://twitter.com/BrankoBrkic).

- Superhighway robbery: Why Moneyweb is right - 30 Sep 2013
- Free African Media: A dream we should all work to fulfil - 8 Feb 2011
- Future of online: making it sustainable - 18 Nov 2010
- The Daily Maverick, one year old and just beginning - 29 Oct 2010
- The ANC's anti-media campaign and its unexpected brilliance - 16 Aug 2010

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>