



Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA)

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PRESS RELEASE

Kenya: Healing the messenger

Launch of a Journalist's trauma booklet

Nairobi, June 25, 2009

Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA) and Kenya Association of Photographers, Illustrators and Designers (KAPIDE) is June 26, 2009, launching a journalist's trauma booklet , **“Healing the Messenger”**, at the Sarova Panafric Hotel in Nairobi.

The booklet, published by International Media Support (IMS), provides insights into the experiences of the Kenyan journalists during the post election violence that hit Kenya in early 2008. The stories contained in the book are told by some of the journalists themselves. The booklet also provides guidance on how to recognize and deal with trauma.

Kenyan journalists, especially the field based correspondents, went through some of the most harrowing experiences as they covered the post election violence. They were left numb, sick and deeply traumatized.

Correspondents contribute an estimated 70 per cent of the daily editorial content, both in electronic and print media. All journalists play an important role in any society and therefore need urgent psychological support to come to terms with such a traumatizing experience as was witnessed during the post election violence.

The Kenyan media community is still struggling with the aftermath of the political violence that killed almost 1,500 people and displaced some 500,000 people. The media, as indeed the entire nation, are yet to sufficiently heal.

As part of a rapid response to the critical needs of the Kenyan media fraternity in the post election conflict period, a trauma counseling initiative was launched in March 2008.

The program provided trauma counseling for a total of 150 journalists and photographers in Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisumu, areas that were worst hit by the post-election violence.

The post-election violence trauma counseling was organized and implemented by the Kenya Correspondents' Association (KCA) and Kenya Association of Photographers, Illustrators and Designers (KAPIDE) with financial support from International Media Support (IMS), based in Copenhagen, Denmark.

It was headed by leading Kenyan psychiatrist and expert in crisis disaster management, Dr. Sobbie Mulindi, and a rapid response team from the Kenyatta National Hospital.

A media forum in Nairobi, dubbed the “Nairobi Round Table” on February 12, 2008, made important recommendations which identified the needs and priorities for support of the Kenyan media community.

During the Media Round Table, it was found that counseling was completely lacking among the vast majority of media practitioners in Kenya. The worst affected were the freelancers and stringers (correspondents) who have no contractual protection and who are not part of the fraternity of a newsroom.

The trauma counseling was part of International Media Support’s strategy in support of Kenyan media. The strategy comprised rapid interventions including safety training for 60 media practitioners in three locations across the country, a workshop in conflict sensitive journalism for 25 reporters in Nairobi and a round table debate, gathering some 40 key media stake holders to assess the challenges and priorities for a more long term strategy.

On this occasion, the Kenya Correspondents Association calls on the Kenyan media industry to critically reflect on what journalists who covered the violence went through and wake up to the fact that Kenya is a nation in conflict. It could happen again and find the media most unready.

The socio-political situation in Kenya remains volatile more than a year after the National Accord was signed to end the violence and each time there is a disagreement in the Coalition government, the country literally convulses and the people become very afraid of what will happen next.

Based on the experiences of the past year and the reality of Kenya since 1992 with intermittent cases of ethno-political conflicts, the media cannot afford to take things for granted and must proactively design interventions that will ensure journalists not only handle conflicts sensitively but also emerge out of such situations, in the kind of physical shape and frame of mind that would enable them not only continue working productively but also lead wholesome lives.

The media industry must pay attention to safety of journalists in conflict situations and need to infuse trauma counseling interventions in the workplace to help the journalists manage work related psychological disorders.

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Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA) brings together media correspondents in Kenya and works towards promoting their welfare and professional development within the media industry.

International Media Support (IMS) contributes to peace, stability and the development of democracy in conflict and conflict threatened areas through rapid interventions to promote and strengthen press freedom. The aim is to allow the population in endangered areas to exercise their right to express themselves freely – also in times of crisis.