

Noted

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FOI laws grow stronger but so does the intimidation

UNESCO 2011. *Freedom of Information: The Right to Know*. Paris: UNESCO. World Press Freedom Day 2010 (e-publication) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001936/193653E.pdf>

UNESCO's recent e-publication based on the 2010 World Press Freedom Day conference, hosted by Queensland University in Brisbane last May, brings together a remarkable selection of presentations by journalists, media and communication professionals from different regions including a substantial contribution from the Pacific. This publication serves as a reminder of the importance of journalists' work, the risks they face and the urgency of



securing their safety and punishing those who violate their right to report freely and safely.

The publication is grouped around six themes focusing on the current status of freedom of information around the world and the challenges and implications for news media, freedom of information as an empowerment tool, issues of transparency and accountability and fighting against corruption, the right to know in the digital age, pressures journalists face in conflict reporting and a whole section on the South Pacific. This last section deals with the threats to media freedom and freedom of information in this region and the contributors bring their stories from

Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and a regional media approach to the right to know. One could ask how you can make an argument about freedom of information when lack of infrastructure for instance results in media not reaching big parts of these islands populations. Access, voice and participation are still big issues for this region.

The Pacific is also present in the other themes but having a section devoted to this region is undoubtedly a great step forward in bringing recognition to the challenges some of the Islands journalists and media currently face. As Kalafi Moala said at the first Pacific Freedom Forum meeting in Apia in 2008 when asked what he wanted to tell UNESCO WPF 2010 about the Pasifika media community: 'Notice us. We exist!' (Pacific Island Journalism Online, 24 August 2011).

This publication does not include all the Pacific presentations made at the UNESCO conference such as John Woods' excellent paper on the challenges the *Cook Islands News* is facing as a result of challenging the Prime Minister and his cabinet on issues of transparency and accountability in spite of the country's *Official Information Act*. These papers were published in the 'Media freedom in Oceania' edition of the *Pacific Journalism Review* (2010).

Although freedom of information laws have been on the increase around the world, so have incidents of intimidation and attacks on journalists as indicated in the third part of this publication which focuses on issues of transparency, accountability and the fight against corruption. Azhgikhina, the secretary of the Russian Union of Journalists, argues that the intimidation and murder of Russian journalists that go unpunished indicate a serious illness in society (p. 73). The right to know should be seen as an entitlement for all, not a favour as La Rue argues (p. 32). And those journalists who defend the truth on behalf of others can claim to attain a higher sense of self or state of being according to Hunter (p. 97)

Overall there is immediacy in the language that engages the reader, as it is mostly the case with this kind of publications that are based on papers delivered as presentations.

Reference

WPF 2010: Media freedom in Oceania (2010, October). *Pacific Journalism Review* (v16, n1). Available online at: <http://search.informit.com.au/browsePublication;py=2010;vol=16;res=E-LIBRARY;issn=1023-9499;iss=2>