

## **JOINT PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Media freedom groups condemn attacks on migrants and threats to journalists**

Amid increasing calls for unlawful action against foreign nationals and growing fears of violence ahead of the self-imposed June 30 deadline imposed by *March and March* and its allies, a coalition of media freedom organisations is warning of increasing threats both to those being targeted and to journalists reporting on these developments.

Recent protests and incidents of violence – including assaults and the killing of Mishack Banda, a 29-year-old Malawian father, in Pietermaritzburg on Friday, June 19 – have heightened concerns about the risk of wider unrest. At the same time, journalists documenting these events have been threatened, physically intimidated and obstructed in their work. In some cases, reporters covering these protests have faced demands that they delete their footage, attempts to seize their equipment, and been threatened with violence for documenting attacks.

*March and March* has also used social media platforms to identify individual journalists and encouraged supporters to do the same in a blatant attempt to intimidate and harass them. The coalition has received multiple reports of journalists facing intimidation, harassment and even criminal incitement to harm following these posts.

The coalition condemns both the targeting of foreign nationals and attacks on media freedom in the strongest terms. It calls on *March and March* to immediately cease publicly targeting journalists and to refrain from any conduct that could expose reporters to intimidation or harm. It further calls on political parties and public representatives supporting the campaign to publicly distance themselves from threats against journalists and any rhetoric that could incite hostility and violence against foreign nationals.

Law enforcement agencies must ensure that everyone is protected from violence and intimidation, that journalists can work safely and without interference, and that those responsible for threats, intimidation, assaults and incitement to violence are investigated, arrested and held accountable.

The threats and violence directed at foreign nationals demand urgent attention and condemnation. Equally troubling are efforts to intimidate those documenting and reporting on those abuses. Publicly targeting journalists in this manner is unacceptable. In an already volatile climate marked by hostility towards foreign nationals, mobilising supporters against individual reporters creates foreseeable risks to their safety and undermines the media's essential role in a democratic society.

Independent reporting is especially vital at moments of heightened tension and uncertainty. Journalists serve as the public's eyes and ears, documenting events, exposing abuses and holding authorities accountable. Efforts to intimidate reporters and suppress coverage not only endangers media workers but also deprive the public of critical information, creating conditions in which violence and impunity can thrive unchecked and making it more difficult to protect vulnerable communities at risk.

Those who seek to drive cameras and witnesses away are often those who do not want the public to see what is done in South Africa's name. When those documenting intimidation and violence are themselves targeted, a key safeguard against abuse is weakened.

The coalition reiterates that everyone in South Africa is entitled to equal protection under the law and to freedom and security of the person, of nationality or immigration status. No grievance, however sincerely held, can justify violence, vigilantism or the targeting of vulnerable members of our communities.

[Organisations]

Amnesty International South Africa

Association of Independent Publishers (AIP)

Campaign for Free Expression

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Media Diversity & Development Agency (MDDA)

Moxii Africa

Press Council of South Africa

South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF)

