

ifex

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

DISPATCHES:

The IFEX Network & Freedom of Expression in 2019



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Executive Director's note

It is a difficult thing to write a report focused on our work in 2019 in the midst of a global pandemic, faced by an unpredictable future that forces us all to rethink, react and regroup. A future unimaginable to us as we closed the book on last year. We ended on a high note, excited by the direction set by members for our path forward and buoyed by the many successes of the network. It was a year that will now, in retrospect, be considered the halcyon days, where we could meet with colleagues face to face, shake hands and share hugs, and plot on our calendars where we had to be in the world to meet in groups of like-minded people to share ideas, make our cases, and hatch our plans.

Nobody knows exactly in what ways this Coronavirus will impact our future, but the many examples of achievement and resilience offered in these stories of IFEX members will inspire us. It presents a collage of challenges and successes from every region, and underscores how 2019 was a pivotal year for the network.

The section **Looking Back to Move Forward** describes the exercise of engaging members in an evaluation of our work over the last four years and, building on that, as co-architects of our future goals through 2024. What is clear is there is a recognition of the growth in expertise, experience and analysis of the issues among the IFEX members, resounding support for continuing to build on our strengths, and acknowledgement of where we need to do better.

You will read about a cold case reopened in Kyrgyzstan, support to a member under threat in Egypt, actions by members in Latin America to counter deteriorating free expression rights in Nicaragua, the establishment of a UN day for access to information led by members in Africa, and efforts to strengthen digital security in Asia Pacific. These stories and more – about defending civic space, raising our voices for inclusion and diversity, expanding our audiences and allies within and outside of our network, seeing states bend to agreeing to address impunity and the safety of journalists – stand as illustrations of the maturity of the network and the steady advancement of our strategies.

Artist Miriam Sугранyes joined us at our 2019 Strategy Conference in Berlin and her impressions of the IFEX network are present in the images throughout the report. How timely, in fact, prescient they are. They represent IFEX as a collection of committed people helping each other, supporting the weight of the challenges facing our work. They show us building and constructing our organisations and responses, being creative in our approaches, looking out for each other and lifting others as we rise, together and from a distance.

This bodes well for all of us as we move forward and continue to ensure the right to freedom of expression and information remains key, gives us purpose, and drives our actions as a network.

Our work remains essential.



The view from here

Looking back to move forward

The final year of our strategic plan was a time to look back, honestly and comprehensively, at our progress over the last five years, to look toward the horizon for upcoming priorities, and to apply what we learned to develop our future roadmap. For IFEX, that meant an illuminating series of evaluations and consultations.

The process was inclusive, robust, and ambitious.

We began by inviting all IFEX members, as well as many of our strategic partners, allies, and donors, to evaluate our work over the last five years, and identify priorities for the next five. Each was able to bring their unique perspective. The result was a compelling picture of our strengths, and our challenges.

Across all evaluation respondents, **IFEX's three key strengths** were identified:

- The diversity of our membership
- Our ability to be an effective conduit for collaborative action and information sharing
- Our demonstrated values and egalitarian approach to working with members and key stakeholders

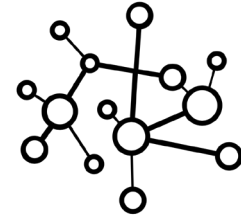
This provides a solid foundation for how we move forward, and

an important acknowledgment of what we bring to this work.

We also asked participants to identify contextual challenges, potential risks, and areas for our critical attention.

A caution against unbridled growth in membership was flagged, noting that – without reflection and planning – it could impact IFEX's ability to harness the full power of the network. Rather, there is an appetite for more thought leadership and coordination towards strategic, nimble, responsive action to geopolitical shifts and events.

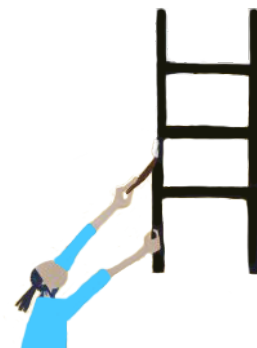
Some 10% of stakeholders identified the need for IFEX to more fully seize, harness and realise the potential of its agency and platform, and noted that, in this rapidly changing geopolitical context, some of the tactics that IFEX uses for policy advocacy, convenings, and information sharing have become outdated.



93%

OF RESPONDENTS

agree that IFEX is a **credible, trustworthy network** that makes an **essential contribution** to freedom of expression.



The shared reflections helped us identify **key areas to focus on**:

1. We need to review our approach to membership.
2. We need to ensure that our tactics keep pace with the evolving, shifting, and often unpredictable contexts we work in.
3. We need to further strengthen IFEX's collective voice, agency and platform, while always respecting – and never usurping – the voices of individual members.

Over several months, a number of further consultations were held with members, staff, and the IFEX Council. This culminated in IFEX's new Strategic Plan for 2020-2024 – one that all stakeholders can and should feel a real sense of ownership with. Their contributions, their voices, have been heard.

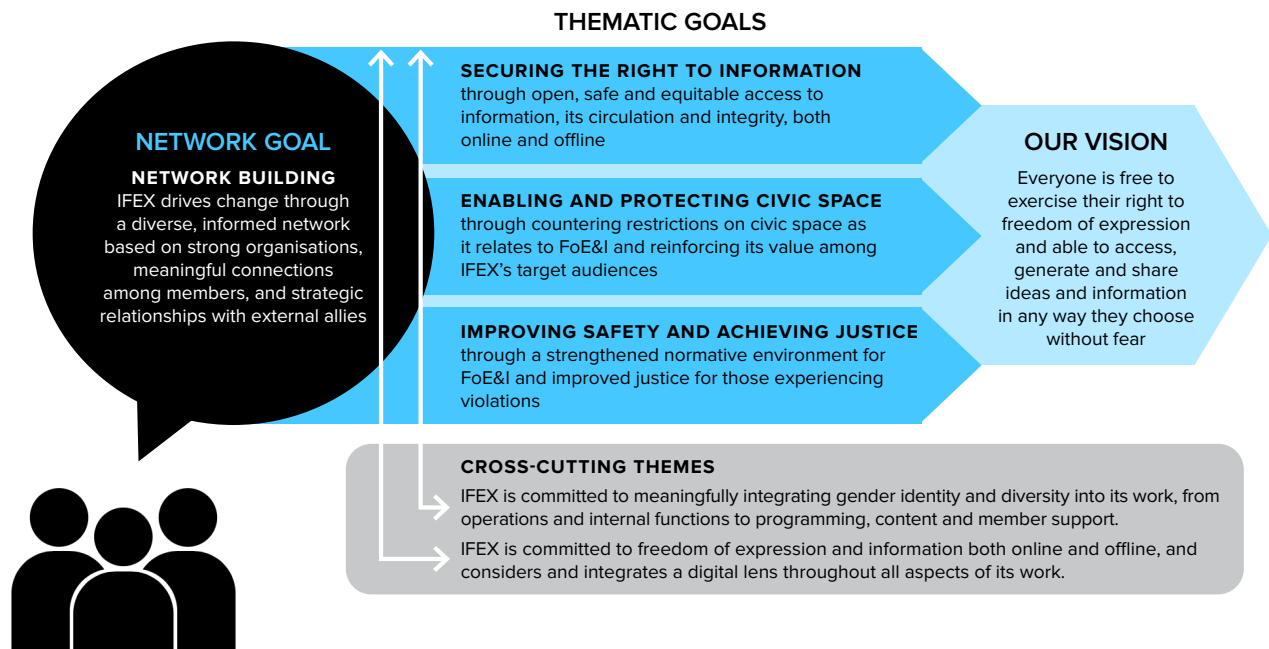
Our new plan has an overarching network building goal, three thematic goals, and essential cross cutting themes that apply across all goal areas.

This plan will help us continue to be responsive to our global, diverse membership, as well as to rapidly evolving global and political realities.

We believe that the process we undertook, together – an honest, thoughtful and respectful consultation that brought in and valued many perspectives – is in itself a good illustration of how we continuously apply the three key strengths identified by members and stakeholders to all our work.

2024 How we're getting there...

IFEX's 2020-2024 Theory of Change details the contextual challenges that IFEX will work within and respond to, the assumptions inherent in IFEX's strategic priorities, and the logical progression from IFEX's day-to-day work to reaching our vision.



Support is key

True to our values, IFEX's approach to member support is consultative, collaborative, flexible – and ever-evolving.

Organisations are most effective when they're deeply rooted in their local contexts and are able to advocate, network and learn beyond their borders – whether regionally or internationally. With over 25 years of experience as a global network promoting freedom of expression and information (FoE&I), we don't just know this; it's embedded in our DNA.

We learn from members' expertise and knowledge of their issues, concerns, and circumstances. Together, we look for creative ways to directly respond to their specific needs and facilitate connections with like-minded organisations across the human rights landscape.

We believe that a diversified approach is the most effective way to provide meaningful support to our broad range of members. This means a commitment to offering appropriate, context-specific and tailor-made assistance that enables each member organisation to effectively and sustainably contribute to achieving our shared goals.

Perhaps the greatest impact of our support is the strong relationships that are nurtured – among members, and between members and the Secretariat – through consistent, respectful interactions, both online and offline. When we are able to create connections within the network through strategic exchanges, bringing members together to share experiences and analysis, it enables learning and creative problem solving.

Network engagement

The bulk of IFEX's support to members is carried out by our Network Engagement Team. It includes work with members and regional networking initiatives on areas such as organisational development, campaigning on strategic issues, networking, and participating in key decision-making spaces, as well as the development of support resources such as toolkits and explainers.

IFEX offers coaching and strategic advice, as needed, and provides grants to bolster the work of the members and support their efforts to explore regional networking opportunities, to work on shared FoE&I initiatives, and to implement key campaigns.

We typically support members with three types of grants:

Project grants: These grants support activities that contribute to an outcome aimed at addressing an issue or issue area, as identified by the member. They can focus on institutional areas such as planning and renewal practices, financial sustainability planning, improving monitoring, evaluation and learning systems, and integrating inclusive and gender-aware approaches to internal practices and external work. They can also support campaigns, advocacy and lobbying that contribute towards IFEX's strategic goals, along with the building of collaborative relationships with external stakeholders.



Media Rights Agenda

@MRA_Nigeria

Mar 16, 2019

Thank you @AnnieGame @MRA_Nigeria greatly values being an @IFEX member. It has made a significant impact on us over the years, helping us to build our institutional capacity, develop a truly global network of partners and contacts and to multiply our influence many times over!

Annie Game

@AnnieGame

Mar 15, 2019

The network has gained a lot from the membership of @MRA_Nigeria a great example of an org that speaks to power and through diligence, expertise and hard work have had a huge impact on the media freedom landscape.

Participation grants: These grants support members to attend and actively participate in relevant workshops, meetings, conferences, and other key decision-making spaces, whether for advocacy, networking, or learning purposes. Such opportunities are key for members to influence decisions, share expertise and stay connected.

Networking grants: These grants bolster regional networking initiatives, including AFEX, SEENPM, SEAPA, PINA, MENA, and IFEX-ALC as well as thematic or country ones such as joint advocacy for Turkey. They foster collaboration with other members in the region or internationally on activities such as joint campaigns, country missions, cross-regional exchanges, and information and skills sharing.

Communications

Our Communications Team, re-envisioned and relaunched in 2018, strengthens and enhances the advocacy and awareness-raising work of members in support of IFEX's strategic goals. Whether through the creation of new editorial and multimedia content, the curation and promotion of content produced by members, or via IFEX-branded campaigns, this work aims to be both strategic and responsive to members' calls for increased and targeted support in this area.

We work with individual members, with regional groupings of members, and at the network-level. We strategically promote and amplify members' key messages and campaigns and strengthen the overall presence and influence of the network over social media and other media platforms.

A great addition to this work is our team of Regional Editors. Based in their regions, they help create stronger connections with and between members through their

original content, draw attention to developing FoE&I trends in their regions while supporting member and network campaigns, and contribute their regional know-how to IFEX's media strategy. Their role was a big part of the success of our World Press Freedom Day (WPF) and International Day to End Impunity (IDEI) campaigns in 2019.

WPF) provides a unique, annual opportunity to take part in a collective global recognition of the critical role media play in the right to freedom of expression and information. IFEX's Regional Editor for Sub Saharan Africa participated in UNESCO's 2019 event in Addis Ababa, and shared her reflections in the piece [UNESCO World Press Freedom Day 2019 – surreal, inspirational, thoughtful and imaginative.](#)

Our 2019 WPF) and IDEI communications campaigns included a series of graphic images that creatively positioned IFEX's speech bubble in six different ways, to illustrate constraints on press freedom and freedom of expression. These were shared with the network so members could adapt them as needed and integrate them into their own communications marking those days. Many incorporated them into their content and shared them over social media, and some went further: IJC Moldova creatively incorporated the imagery into their [pop-up press freedom protest](#) in Chisinau.

The images came out of our collaboration with marketing

agency Juniper Park, which began over a decade ago and continues strong – and we aren't the only ones who think so. In 2019 they received a Tribute in the [Act Responsible](#) / Human Rights category for their 2018 WPF) campaign imagery for IFEX, and three of their visuals for IFEX's 2018 and 2019 WPF) and IDEI campaigns won [2020 Applied Arts and Illustration awards](#) in the illustration category.

IFEX will continue to increase its voice and visibility, expanding the conversation around freedom of expression and information, raising awareness, championing the work of members, gaining allies, and using its higher profile in strategic spaces.

NEW WEBSITE

A website is in many ways the public face of an organisation. It tells the world who we are, what we do, and what matters to us. In May of 2019 we redesigned ifex.org to more effectively communicate IFEX's identity as a network, and to better showcase the work of members. We also streamlined site navigation, search and filtering. The process included a move to a new content management system, which has made it easier to showcase multimedia. Last (but not least!) we moved to a new website server host to provide better site speed and support, and switched to a new analytics platform (Matomo) that will better protect our visitors' privacy.

Gender takes a front seat

Making a commitment to promote and defend everyone's right to freedom of expression and information is meaningless if it doesn't take into consideration that the expression of these rights cannot be separated from other rights, realities, and identities, including gender.

The road to integrating gender into each aspect of IFEX programming is being built on a foundation of increased awareness and understanding. We learn from the expertise and lived experiences of others, including members. We pilot and evaluate new approaches, and we share tactics, tools and best practices with the network, and beyond.

Looking back, we feel proud of what we've accomplished in the three years since the launch of our gender equality strategy. Many members were already strong advocates. With help from a gender consultant in 2016, we started to develop a concrete roadmap.

It's been a winding road and we have undoubtedly made some false starts, hit some roadblocks, and made some detours – but each year has taken us further.

Auditing our content

In 2019, we reviewed the Gender & Sexual Diversity Audit tool. We had found it to be a strong internal resource, and we wanted to share it more broadly. However, we wanted to test whether it was clear enough that it could be used by someone who had not been directly involved in its design. (Spoiler alert: we identified through this process the need for some modifications to the tool,

and that next step is part of our 2020 work plan.)

We performed the audit on a different set of our original content in 2019: the Regional Briefs. These are monthly reports produced by our Regional Editors. The audit found them to be significantly stronger on almost every metric measured than the content we had assessed the year before. The report also highlighted areas for improvement, including imagery in our multimedia projects and bringing more of a gender lens to our social media posts.

Gender and our network

Communications are only part of IFEX's Gender Equality Strategy. We continue to provide support to members to integrate a gender equality lens into their activities as well as their internal policies, procedures and practices. Our approach is to lead by example, to find opportunities to integrate discussions of gender into our conversations with members, and to always share best practices.

Last year provided an excellent example of this, in the case of a [joint action](#) IFEX published on 18 June, 2019, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Malak Al-Kashif.

GENDER FORWARD!

We are committed to building understanding among allies - actual and potential - of the connections between gender and freedom of expression. To mark International Women's Day (IWD) on 8 March and the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) on 17 May, we posted a number of Twitter threads on the work of IFEX members on gender issues, women in the frontlines defending FoE&I around the world; threats to the freedom to express gender & sexual identity, and profiles of those who defend those rights. Combined, the threads had over 140,000 views.

We're also bringing a strengthened gender lens to our advocacy. In 2019 23% of IFEX-supported actions (as compared with 6% in 2018) had an explicit gender dimension. These included:

- an urgent appeal for the release of Malak Kashif, a transgender activist imprisoned in Egypt for expressing her views on Facebook.
- an appeal directed to the Formula One Group, demanding support for safeguarding human rights in Bahrain and outlining discrimination against journalist Nazeeha Saeed and the imprisonment of activist Najah Yusuf.
- an appeal calling for the renewal of the mandate of the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity at the UN.

Malak is a transgender woman. She had been jailed in a men's prison in Egypt, after expressing her political views on Facebook and her opinions about how authorities had addressed a train station accident in Egypt which killed dozens of citizens. The 19-year-old was arrested in a dawn police raid of her mother's home. She was interrogated on trumped-up charges of joining a terrorist group under Article 12 of the Anti-Terrorism Act 2015 – a charge that exposed her to the maximum imprisonment penalty.

The prosecution had initially given Malak 15 days of pretrial detention, which she spent in solitary confinement at Al-Haram police station in Giza. On 19 March, the Prosecution had extended her pretrial detention, which she spent in solitary confinement in the El-Zeraa section Tora Prison – a prison for men.

The dangers Malak was being exposed to in not only being incarcerated, but being incarcerated in a men's prison, while her health was already compromised by a 2018 accident, were profoundly concerning.

The events that led up to IFEX's joint action on her behalf illustrate how each step in the path to gender equality helps lay the foundation for the next.

We can trace this particular path at least as far back as November 2018, when IFEX MENA members met for their regional meeting in

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In recent years, we have noticed IFEX has spoken out more on gender-related issues. Even in my organisation, we have started to talk about gender more and do gender mainstreaming – and we were inspired by IFEX to do this.

–STRATEGIC PLAN
CONSULTATION

”

Paris. There, they had affirmed their interest in finding ways to integrate gender and diversity into their work.

Then, on to early 2019, when IFEX programme staff participated in workshops and developed approaches and tools to facilitate their conversations with members about gender equality and diversity.

Our team's enhanced capacity came into use when working with MENA members to plan the agenda for their regional meeting to take place in April, in Berlin, and they proposed a focus on FoE&I interactions with gender and diversity.

At the meeting, IFEX staff and members were able to share experiences and resources, resulting in lively exchanges on gender and gendered programming in their national and regional contexts.

The path to gender equality is circuitous. Over the years, IFEX has begun to bring a more intersectional approach to this work, and has used this to integrate gender, inclusivity and diversity more holistically across all of the thematic goals in the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan.



95%

OF RESPONDENTS

agree IFEX is committed to making the organisation more **safe, accessible and respectful** for people of all diversities.

Safety & accountability

Our work to promote a safer environment for journalists and all those exercising their right to freedom of expression and information was fought on many fronts in 2019. As ever, we focussed our efforts on strengthening the normative environment while advocating strongly for accountability in cases of crimes committed against specific individuals.

Calling out impunity: Cases and countries

There is a growing understanding that attacks against the media are part of a systemic range of abuses aimed at suppressing critical voices and the public's right to know. Changing this reality calls for perseverance, creativity, strategic advocacy, effective communications, and a broad network of allies.

Recent cases of violent crimes committed against high profile journalists continued to hold the world's attention in 2019. The brutal murders of Daphne Caruana Galizia, Jamal Khashoggi, and Ján Kuciak, among others, sparked a global response. People took to the streets, protesting in the tens of thousands. The anger has been tangible.

Civil society's calls for action in Khashoggi's case found a powerful ally in Dr. Agnès Callamard, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. At our Strategy Conference in April 2019 she spoke of her groundbreaking investigation and her report, due to be released in June. She called on all of us to help change the paradigm and bring an end to impunity in this case.

Several IFEX members contributed to her report; we also facilitated a [joint action](#) for Khashoggi, released a [statement](#) and a [short video](#) to amplify the report's findings and recommendations, and featured it in our International Day to End Impunity [video](#) "What people are doing right now to end impunity."

Kyrgyzstan

If we had drawn up a list of the countries in 2019 most likely to respond to external pressure to address human rights abuses – a valuable strategy to adopt in some instances when planning advocacy – Kyrgyzstan wouldn't have been at the top. The fact that 2018 had come and gone without the country meeting its obligation to fulfill a 2016 UN Human Rights Committee decision to release human rights defender [Azimjon Askarov](#) was met with disappointment, but not surprise.

The investigation into the case of murdered journalist [Alisher Saipov](#) had been suspended, apparently indefinitely, in 2013. In coordination with local members the Media Policy Institute and Public Association of Journalists, IFEX called on the government to provide updated information about the case to the UNESCO Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity.

It was not the first time we had made such a demand. And there was no reason to expect it would result in a response from the

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We are grateful for the statement and the solidarity. In emblematic cases such as this it is important that the judges know it is not only a family concern. On the contrary, there are a lot of organisations following this case to see what will happen.

– IFEX MEMBER OLA THANKING IFEX-ALC FOR ITS STATEMENT ON THE HUGO BUSTIÓS CASE

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government this time. But with persistence, our voices were heard; the previously cold case was [re-opened](#), and prosecutors are revisiting the investigation. The Prosecutor General attributed this development directly to [our continued outreach](#).

Colombia

For over half a century Colombia endured a conflict that cost the lives of an estimated 200,000 people. Millions were displaced. The 2016 peace accord brought hopes that the cycle of violence

would be broken, but instead, it remains a grim background to efforts at peacebuilding and the work of the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In 2000, investigative journalist Jineth Bedoya Lima was visiting a prison while investigating the country's illegal arms sales when she was abducted, raped, and tortured. She survived the ordeal, and is a passionate advocate for justice in her own case and those of others.

Impunity does not always end when those who participated directly in the acts are behind bars. When states, through inaction or inadequate responses, fail to meet their responsibility to their citizens, they too must be held accountable.

In the almost two decades since the attack, IFEX, local member FLIP and many others in the network have remained active in Bedoya's case. After years of sustained efforts and periodic advances, 2019 brought with it two major developments.

First, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights opened a hearing on her case with the Colombian State – the first ever involving a female journalist. Second, a Colombian court issued a [conviction](#) against Alejandro Cárdenas Orozco and Jesús Emiro Pereira Rivera for the crimes committed against her. To help unpack the significance of these developments, IFEX

published an article on this [historic precedent](#) and, in collaboration with FLIP, produced a [video](#) featuring Bedoya, along with the stories of Edison Molina and Guillermo Cano, two tragic cases of Colombian impunity.

As a happy bookend to this project, Jineth Bedoya was awarded the 2020 Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize. During her acceptance speech, Jineth personally thanked IFEX and FLIP for our work on her case over the years.

Malta

The murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia – Maltese journalist, writer, and anti-corruption activist – on 16 October 2017, shocked and galvanized people around the world. Her family, friends, and former colleagues helped keep her story front and centre, never letting the world's notoriously fickle attention wander too far. A poignant symbol of this has been the memorial to her, in Valletta, which was torn down every night by authorities, and put back every day by her supporters.

IFEX joined the advocacy efforts of several members to demand justice in her case, including publishing joint [statements](#) and conducting [advocacy missions](#) at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Our efforts contributed to PACE

adopting a resolution mandating an independent public inquiry, which the Maltese Government has [since established](#).

After signs of [political interference](#), IFEX also worked to help monitor the independence of the inquiry. In 2019, several high-profile arrests were made in connection with her death, including a cabinet member and advisor to the Prime Minister.



Matthew Caruana Galizia

@mcaruanagalizia
Jun 16, 2019

Thank you @ECPMF, @article19org, @IFEX, @IndexCensorship, @globalfreemedia, @pen_int and @RSF_inter for reminding European leaders of Muscat's "refusal to hold a public inquiry into the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia".

Index on Censorship

@IndexCensorship
Jun 16, 2019

Appeal on EU leaders before 6th South EU Summit to be held in Malta <https://indexoncensorship.org/2019/06/appeal-on-eu-leaders-before-6th-south-eu-summit-to-be-held-in-malta/>... #DaphneCaruanaGalizia

The Gambia

Like Colombia, The Gambia has gone through massive upheaval in recent years.

Since the inception of our No Impunity Campaign in 2015, IFEX has continued to work with the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and the Gambia Press Union (GPU) for full justice in the cases of murdered journalists Ebrima Manneh, Musa Saidu Khan and Deyda Hydara. We have consistently supported their efforts with strategically timed communications and collaborative advocacy initiatives.

In 2019 we targeted communications to keep The Gambia in the spotlight, first with [an article](#) highlighting how MFWA had adjusted their campaign to end impunity in these cases to adapt to changing political contexts and power structures in

the country; then with a special [feature](#) about their mission to Geneva in advance of Gambia's Universal Periodic Review that IFEX supported and participated in, and finally with [an interview](#) with Saikou Jammeh of the GPU on his participation in The Gambia's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC), where the murderer of Deyda Hydara did not just confess – he exposed former President Yahya Jammeh as the mastermind.

The UPR advocacy was effective; the government agreed to several recommendations, and committed to continue striving for accountability for previous and future attacks against journalists. Just as importantly for The Gambia's future, the state vowed to undertake other measures to create a safe and enabling environment for journalists, through legislative reform.

NEW RESOURCES FOR GLOBAL ADVOCACY

To continue to support the desire of IFEX members to strategically engage in global advocacy spaces, we produced three new explainers in 2019, available in English, Spanish, French and Arabic:

- [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\): What role for freedom of expression?](#)
- [Open Government Partnership \(OGP\): Linking openness to freedom of expression](#)
- [How the IACHR can bolster your advocacy work in the Americas](#)

These bring the total number of IFEX 5-Minute Explainers to 12! They are consistently among the most visited pages on our website.

MESSAGE RECEIVED



IFEX recommendations in 2019:

- The Draft Report of the Working Group for Nicaragua's UPR contained 45 recommendations related to FoE, access to information and safety of journalists. as advocated for in a joint IFEX-ALC, AMARC-ALC, and IAPA submission. Nicaragua accepted a number of these recommendations during HRC 42.
- A record 100 member states co-sponsored the latest UNGA resolution on journalist safety and impunity that included inputs from IFEX and members.
- Chile accepted a recommendation on protecting journalists and HRDs in online contexts put forward by IFEX member Derechos Digitales.
- The Gambia accepted 14 recommendations related to protecting freedom of expression and information, including that of journalists and human rights defenders that are threatened or attacked.
- 4 IFEX members provided inputs for the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders thematic report on impunity for crimes against human rights defenders.
- 7 national IFEX members and a number of international members provided inputs to the UNSG's implementation report on UNGA resolution 72/175 with a focus on implementation of the UN Plan of Action.
- UNESCO screened a video produced by IFEX at their IPDC Bureau meeting calling on states to provide regular, detailed information for the DG's report on safety and impunity.
- Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings on the investigation into the killing of Jamal Khashoggi contained recommendations made by IFEX members.
- Cambodia accepted 6 recommendations on protection and impunity put forward by IFEX and CCHR during the country's 3rd cycle UPR.

Mexico

The [murder rate in Mexico](#) has hit an all-time high, with an average of 95 murders per day. [Reports](#) estimate that almost half of all journalists murdered in 2019 were murdered in Mexico.

Along with international and local members, IFEX participated in an urgent [international advocacy mission](#) to the country in November 2019. It took place parallel to UNESCO's event in Mexico City marking the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.

The mission involved several members of the International Civil Society Coalition on Safety of Journalists, as well as local IFEX member organisations and other Mexican civil society organisations. The shared objective: to draw attention to the freedom of expression crisis in the country, and in particular, the scourge of violence against journalists and the near total impunity.

The immediate outcomes included a [number of commitments](#) secured from government officials to undertake measures to address the problem, though they declined to recognize the extent of the dangers journalists face.

Another outcome: hope. As IFEX's Deputy Executive Director noted in an [interview](#), the networking and solidarity among Mexican journalists, especially female journalists, is inspiring. The work of IFEX and others to follow up on the work of the mission and strengthen international solidarity can contribute to the impact of the work of journalists joining together at the local and national levels to pressure their government from within.

Looking back, we see in this experience an illustration of the foundation of trust IFEX has built over the years, and a recognition of its commitment to respectful and consultation-based leadership. Our skills in networking, bringing groups together and managing communications were called upon in the development and delivery of this mission.

Bahrain

In May 2019 we brought IFEX members and partners together in Tunis. Our objective: to come up with strategies with the potential to bring about positive change in Bahrain – a country mired in a fraught and intractable climate for human rights.

This initiative engaged a number of organisations that had not

worked together before – but here, they found common ground. Participants from 11 different local, regional and international organisations were able to identify strategies for collaborating and supporting local stakeholders and CSOs, reclaiming civic space in Bahrain, and influencing the situation from outside – primarily by using strategic pressure points to challenge the government's external-facing narrative about the country.

The meeting sparked new collaboration, as members based in Egypt and Bahrain exchanged concrete tools and resources.

Coordinating our efforts

Last, but certainly not least, we held our No Impunity coordination meeting, bringing together eight IFEX members engaged in this issue at national, regional and international levels.

In 2019, this annual event coincided with a key stage in the development of our new strategic plan, so we were able to identify and prioritize activities that will reinforce our work on safety & justice, strengthen collaborations between members, and explore new strategies and mechanisms for addressing the issue going forward.



Strategic solidarity in Latin America and the Caribbean

From foundational work developing their next Strategic Plan, to efforts on behalf of members under threat, to strategic advocacy work at international, regional and national levels, 2019 was further proof of the maturity and power of this regional network.

Solidarity with Nicaragua

As mentioned in our 2018 Dispatches report, the rapid deterioration of freedom of expression in Nicaragua, combined with spiralling violence and impunity, sparked a decision by IFEX-ALC to collaborate on the country – even though there is no national IFEX-ALC member.

In May 2019 Nicaragua was scheduled to have its Universal Periodic Review (UPR). IFEX-ALC's previous experience engaging with the UN on Paraguay meant that it was prepared to make a strong intervention. Along with the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC-ALC), they put forward a joint UPR submission.

We know how important sustained and strategic communications are, not only to keep the international pressure on, but also to support those enduring the daily reality of life in the country. IFEX published a feature in [April](#), in addition to committing to sustained social media promotion, and outreach to traditional media.

The groups sent a delegation to [participate](#) in the UPR pre-session in Geneva, where they could advocate directly with member states of the Human Rights Council. Fundación Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, a Nicaraguan organisation dedicated to the

“

It has meant so much to AMARC to have participated in Nicaragua's 2019 UPR. This would have been impossible without IFEX. We are honoured to be part of this network, and we are glad that our members have a voice to defend the right to freedom of expression, a right that has been, and keeps being, flagrantly violated in Nicaragua.

– AMARC-ALC

”

defense of freedom of expression in Nicaragua, joined as IAPA's representative.

The participation of this local NGO, as well as the presence of a Nicaraguan journalist who is a member of AMARC-ALC, brought a personal and compelling message to the meetings.

The value personal stories bring to advocacy was made clear from prior work on Paraguay's UPR. In Nicaragua's case, it also attracted the attention of local newspapers, resulting in strong media coverage by eight outlets, not just during the UPR pre-session, but also during the HRC session in May.

When the UPR took place on 15 May, the report included more than 40 recommendations related to freedom of expression. This was promising.

ADVOCACY AGAINST CRIMINAL DEFAMATION

The use of criminal law against journalists is a common tactic throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The new year was just a few days old when [IFEX-ALC submitted an Amicus Curiae to the Inter American Court of Human Rights](#), in the case of [Tulio Alvarez v Venezuela](#).

The case involved criminal defamation charges by a public servant against a journalist, based on an opinion piece they had written. In the Amicus Curiae, IFEX-ALC successfully requested that the Court reaffirm its standard on this topic, to set a healthier precedent.

The Court [published the ruling](#) on 4 October 2019, reaffirming that it is contrary to the American Convention of Human Rights to use criminal law against journalists, especially in their role as watchdogs over the public service.

A welcome outcome; this is a [critical issue in the region](#), and having a strong standard is key.

But by September 2019, we had an idea that the state was not going to respond as we hoped. IFEX-ALC, the Fundación Violeta Barrios Chamorro and IAPA [submitted an alternative report](#) on the freedom of expression situation in Nicaragua, for consideration by the UN Human Rights Committee.

It was disappointing when – out of 48 recommendations geared toward guaranteeing protection and promotion of freedom of expression, press freedom and access to information, and ensuring respect for the independence and diversity of the media – only 14 were accepted.

Of course, IFEX-ALC and its partners responded immediately with a [statement of concern](#), and IFEX published, in response to the unrealistic picture of Nicaragua portrayed by the state, the feature article [This is not the country in which we are living](#).

In their next meeting with the executive secretary of the

Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) and its Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, members of the IFEX-ALC Coordinating Committee raised the issue of Nicaragua and the recommendations that had not been accepted. Even though the country's next UPR would not be for four more years, the IACHR continually monitors the human rights situation there, and their reports are essential for IFEX-ALC submissions to the UN.

The network persists, as always, finding creative ways to achieve its objectives through alternative means. In November 2019 it was able to support,

through Fundamedios, four exiled Nicaraguan journalists to participate in the initiative “Voces de libertad”. The project refuses to allow journalists to be silenced by the violence that has forced them to flee their country, and allows them to continue reporting on what is really going on.

The experience working with Nicaragua encouraged IFEX-ALC to include in its new strategic plan the objective of strengthening and broadening its presence in Central America and the Caribbean, to increase its coverage of countries currently under-represented in their work, through similarly creative and dynamic collaborations.



VOICES UNITED

IFEX worked on 60 joint actions and IFEX statements in 2019, 13 of which can be connected to demonstrable impacts during the year.

- The PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights adopted the special rapporteur's report on the investigation into Daphne Caruana Galizia's killing after IFEX joined a statement with the **Malta** coordinating group calling for the report to be supported by Maltese authorities.
- **Malta** also established an independent commission of inquiry and arrested several individuals, including high-profile government officials, in connection with Caruana Galizia's murder after a number of joint statements and advocacy actions by the Malta coordinating group.
- IFEX advocacy and social media promotion of **Nicaragua's** UPR led to widespread media coverage in local news outlets and a number of FoE related recommendations raised during the review.
- **Chad's** social media ban was lifted months after IFEX's joint action was circulated.
- The UN Special Rapporteur for freedom of opinion of expression confirmed that they sent a communication to the Ugandan state about the wrongful detention and charges against **Ugandan** musician, activist and MP Bobi Wine after a joint appeal by IFEX and AFIC.
- Federal **Mexican** officials agreed to take steps to strengthen the national protection mechanism and special prosecutor's unit after an international advocacy mission that IFEX and several national and international members participated in.
- The Inter-American Court ruled in favour of **Venezuelan** journalist Alvarez Ramos, declaring that his rights to free expression and due process were violated, as per IFEX-ALC's Amicus Curiae submission.
- **UNGA resolution on journalist safety and impunity** was adopted with IFEX and member inputs.
- Charges against **Turkish** author Fikret Başkaya were dropped after a joint statement with IFEX members.
- César Ricaurte, the Executive Director of Fundamedios, was able to return to **Ecuador** after IFEX-ALC actions condemning his 15-day jail sentence and the threats he had received subsequently. The sentence was never enforced.
- **Sudanese** journalist Osman Mirghani was released after interventions by the UN special procedures facilitated by IFEX and AFEX.
- The acquittal of the murderer of **Peruvian** journalist Hugo Bustíos was revoked in line with IFEX-ALC's statement on the issue.
- The **Kyrgyz** government re-opened an investigation into the killing of journalist Alisher Saipov. The Prosecutor General cited IFEX's continued inquiries as the catalyst.

Now more than ever: Safety for African journalists

The regional network of IFEX members in Africa is taking action to ensure that a new way of coordinating work and engaging with regional mechanisms will improve the safety of journalists.

IFEX members know that when journalists aren't safe, when they are assaulted, arrested, harassed, or even murdered because of their work, something is lost that is absolutely essential for democracy: access to information in the public interest, and access to more than just one side of a story. This requires a flourishing, free, and independent media, led by journalists who don't have to live in fear.

The statistics are troubling. According to UNESCO's observatory of killed journalists, 1,385 journalists have been killed since 1993. Countries in Africa account for 222 of these deaths.

Since its founding in 2013, AFEX, the regional network of IFEX member organisations in Africa, has made the safety of journalists, along with the closely-related issue of ending impunity for crimes committed against them, a key focus.

AFEX members have been incorporating advocacy on safety of journalists into their regular activities, monitoring and calling out incidents in their respective countries or regions.

AFEX has also increased its advocacy work on the issue, with a focus in recent years on laying the groundwork for the establishment of a Working Group on Safety of Journalists within the framework of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

IFEX has been able to provide

sustained support to AFEX throughout this process.

With our support, AFEX and UNESCO organised and hosted a two-day interregional conference in Addis Ababa. The outcome was the establishment of a coordination mechanism to bring together stakeholders working on the issue of safety of journalists at the continental, sub-regional and national levels.

AFEX was able to provide the specific perspectives of national-level stakeholders, and used the initiative to form an implementation plan and mobilize government action to develop and institutionalize protection mechanisms throughout the region.

Prior to the 2018 Addis Ababa conference, IFEX had facilitated an exchange between AFEX and IFEX-ALC, the regional network of IFEX members in Latin America and the Caribbean. Members from both networks considered what lessons could be transferred from the experiences advocating for the safety of journalists in their respective regions, particularly with respect to national protection mechanisms.

At its Annual General Meeting in April 2019, AFEX members unequivocally [denounced](#) the increasing threats and attacks against journalists working across Africa and the widespread impunity for crimes against them.

Shortly thereafter, it supported three of its members to attend a session on the Safety of

Journalists' Coordination Mechanisms at UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day event in Addis Ababa. The session was moderated by AFEX, and the panel included UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression David Kaye, Ghana's Minister of Information Kojo Opong Nkrumah, and Gachungi.

Progress on the idea of establishing a Working Group had slowed since 2018. Session participants agreed that a coalition should be established to drive the project forward and to lead engagements with the AU and other relevant actors. AFEX was selected to lead the coordination of civil society and media network involvement in this process, within the broader coalition that includes representatives from government, academia, UNESCO, and others.

In October, as attention turned to the 64th Session of the ACHPR, AFEX worked with UNESCO and other partners to organise a side-event to bring together diverse stakeholders from across Africa's media landscape. The focus: to create synergy and avoid duplication of efforts among state and non-state actors working to promote the safety of journalists.

We will continue to support AFEX and IFEX's African members as they drive forward this important work. Their vision of a continent where journalists can do their jobs freely, without fear, deserves no less.

Influencing global change: IFEX behind the scenes

IFEX's involvement in inter-governmental and other global collaborations allows us to harness the collective efforts of free expression champions and advocates of different stripes, while ensuring that the voice of IFEX – and crucially, of IFEX members – is heard in these spaces, to help shape a strong agenda informed by regional realities.

In 2019, our advocacy efforts on the issue of safety and impunity continued to leverage – and add value to – coordination mechanisms at the global level, as well as in specific country situations. This work brings together like-minded NGOs working on press freedom, media development and sustainability, as well as media practitioners, governments, and inter-governmental actors.

Our commitment to supporting and strengthening existing inter-governmental mechanisms has never wavered. In 2019 IFEX compiled inputs from several members to strengthen critical international texts on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, including the UN Secretary-General's [implementation report](#) on General Assembly resolution 72/175 with a focus on implementation of the UN Plan of Action, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders' [thematic report](#) on impunity for crimes against human rights defenders. We also helped secure a new [General Assembly resolution](#) on safety and impunity that reflected the recommendations and concerns of IFEX members.

A more recent initiative is IFEX's involvement with the International Civil Society Coalition on the Safety of Journalists. Formed in 2017, this group of international and regional press freedom, free expression, and media

development organisations initially came together to collectively provide feedback on the status of the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

Since then, participants have agreed to coordinate around strategically chosen initiatives that promote the safety of journalists and an end to impunity at the global level as well as in specific countries.

In 2019, this included working together to shape Canada and the UK's '[Defend Media Freedom](#)' conference, and the resulting outcomes. We strove to ensure that priority themes were included in the conference's agenda, and that commitments made during the conference were more than mere platitudes. We want the work of the new Media Freedom Coalition to reinforce, rather than duplicate, existing efforts, and make sure that initiatives are planned and implemented in close consultation with impacted stakeholders, including IFEX members.

A concrete expression of this has been the formation of the Media Freedom Coalition's Advisory Network. While the Coalition is made up of states that signed a '[global pledge on media freedom](#)' in London, the Advisory Network is made up of civil society actors who will work closely with the Coalition to provide civil society guidance on urgent cases and recommended modes for responding.

It is a testament to the growing profile and credibility of IFEX as an advocate for civil society in these global spaces that, in 2020, IFEX's Deputy Executive Director Rachael Kay was elected by the Advisory Network to serve as one of three civil society co-chairs that will act as the main interlocutors between the Advisory Network and the Executive Group.

IFEX's position within this group will be invaluable for ensuring IFEX members and their perspectives are represented in conversations about turning opportunities for the Media Freedom Coalition into action.



Agnes Callamard

@AgnesCallamard

Nov 2, 2019

Thank you @IFEX and @AnnieGame for your leadership fighting impunity for crimes against journalists.

IFEX

@IFEX

Nov 1, 2019

Those who carry out such crimes often believe they are untouchable — we need to prove them wrong. As @AgnesCallamard told a room full of passionate free expression supporters at our #IFEX2019 conference in April.

Fighting Impunity on a Global Scale

In 2019, IFEX provided members and regional networks with strategic and financial support for their impunity work around the globe.

MEXICO

R3D submitted a report for Mexico's Human Rights Committee review that focused on justice and oversight for illegal surveillance of journalists and HRDs.

NICARAGUA

IFEX-ALC, IAPA, and AMARC-ALC conducted an advocacy mission to Geneva to lobby diplomatic missions for the inclusion of recommendations on the protection of journalists and protestors and for accountability for previous attacks put forward during Nicaragua's UPR.

THE GAMBIA

MFWA is addressing safety and impunity in The Gambia through the country's UPR and truth, reconciliation and reparations commission (TRRC), as well as in the broader West African region through engagement with relevant UN and AU mechanisms, fostering dialogue with journalists and law enforcement, and other advocacy activities. **GPU** submitted a report on abuses against journalists under the Jammeh regime for the country's TRRC and is advocating for related prosecutions.

SYRIA

SCM is documenting and reporting on cases of attacks and impunity against journalists and using this data to launch a grassroots advocacy initiative consisting of journalists and victims' families targeting EU officials for policies to address the issue.

KYRGYZSTAN

MPI was supported to conduct an advocacy mission to Geneva to push for adoption of recommendations on media freedom and safety of journalists for Kyrgyzstan's UPR.

MONGOLIA

GIC is being supported to help promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists in Mongolia by reporting on and pushing for updated recommendations in their upcoming UPR, while raising awareness about the process and the issues at stake at the national level.

ECUADOR

Fundamedios attended the High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs to present a regional shadow report with several other IFEX members as part of the Voces Del Sur project for monitoring and reporting on progress on SDG 16.10.01 on the number of journalist killings, and to conduct advocacy meetings with officials.

PARAGUAY

SPP is working with stakeholders in government and media to draft and raise awareness about a journalist safety bill in Paraguay.

BOLIVIA

ANP is advocating for safety of journalists and impunity to be addressed in Bolivia's upcoming UPR through a joint submission and advocacy in Geneva.

COLOMBIA

FLIP is using strategic litigation to get results in 3 emblematic cases of impunity while continuing to advocate with the Attorney General to meet the State's obligations to protect journalists under international law, in addition to submitting a report to Colombia's truth commission on how violence against journalists affected the press during the armed conflict.

BAHRAIN

GCHR held an exhibit and a seminar to highlight cases of attacks against journalists in the MENA region and discuss responses amongst stakeholders. **ADHRB** is pushing for accountability for impunity in Bahrain using mechanisms such as Magnitsky sanctions, the mid-term UPR, and by pressuring private actors to divest and publicly raise concerns.

PAKISTAN

PPF is monitoring and reporting on cases of attacks against journalists using the SDG framework to push for government action, and to mobilize other stakeholders in Pakistan, including press clubs and media unions to spotlight cases of impunity and increase demand on the government for redress.

CAMBODIA

CCHR is raising awareness and demands for accountability in Cambodia, working with grassroots activists and producing multimedia materials to keep impunity cases in the spotlight while working at the international level to push for acceptance and implementation of Cambodia's UPR recommendations.

Member-driven... Building network capacity

Our work building on and amplifying the strengths of IFEX members is based on mutual trust, a commitment to egalitarian principles, and respecting and learning from the diversity of our network.

Strategy Conference: IFEX in Berlin!

“Takeaways: One is that oftentimes we get so stuck in our conventional approach to our advocacy that we tend to forget exploring more creative and perhaps novel strategies for more effective initiatives. The other is simply being encouraged by the thought that we are one big global community of advocates for press freedom and freedom of expression, that no matter the enormous challenges confronting us, we are not alone, and that we have the support of others in that expanding global community.” - 2019 Strategy Conference participant

As Executive Director Annie Game noted in her opening remarks to the free expression advocates and allies at our 2019 Strategy Conference, our traditional approaches are hitting walls. “We need to rethink how to do this work in a climate where outrage has been normalized, protests ignored, statements unheard and laws upturned.”

We chose Berlin for this meeting – a city known as an international hub of creativity, innovation, tech, community, and culture. A natural fit for those of us who love freedom of expression, and a city that knows something about taking down walls.

We wanted to use this time together to create a public square for the IFEX network and our allies, a creative space conducive to shaking things up, sparking new ideas, and finding ways to turn those ideas into actions.

Creativity was spliced in. We even had a soundtrack; a [revolutionary musical playlist](#) provided by Venezuelan

journalist and DJ Melanio Escobar. Iranian political cartoonist (and head of United Sketches) Kianoush Ramzani sat in on sessions, capturing key conversation points with his pen, and Spanish illustrator from Child Rights International Network (CRIN) Miriam Sugranyes captured her overall impressions of the conference with the inspiring painting that appears on the cover of this report.

Artistic expression was the theme of the first plenary: The Early Show (it was, after all, 9:30 in the morning). Political scientist, thought-leader (and temporary IFEX talk-show host) Geraldine de Bastion led a wide-ranging discussion with writer Iyad el-Baghdadi, singer, activist and parliamentarian Bobi Wine – who also treated us to a rousing musical performance – and Quechua artist, writer, and documentary film-maker Violeta Ayala.

We brought that same creative lens to the urgent question of how to campaign for greater

impact. In Campaign Revival, activist and former UN Special rapporteur on the right to freedom of assembly Maina Kiai was joined for a chat ‘around the kitchen table’ by Brazil’s Queer Museum Curator Gaudêncio Fidelis, founder of Girl Activists of Kyrgyzstan Zhanna Zharmatova, Lady Parts Justice League founder (and former head writer for The Daily Show) Lizz Winstead, and Syrian Archive Director Hadi El Khatib.

“

Every year it seems that the challenges are becoming harder to overcome. It is invigorating to know that we are not alone in this struggle, and we should definitely keep ourselves connected to ensure our resilience.

– STRATEGY CONFERENCE
EVALUATION

”

Then, in the session Really, Who is Listening? John Clark of UK brand agency Coley Porter Bell shared some timely and welcome ideas about how we can adapt some of the strategies corporate and political campaigns use to garner more influence and get our messages to more strongly resonate with the audiences we need to reach.

Journalist safety and the problem of impunity were also front and centre. In conversation with Annie Game, Dr. Agnès Callamard, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and director of Columbia Global Freedom of Expression at Columbia University, reported on her inquiry and push for accountability in the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. She called on us all to not let this case fade, and to support her in her continued efforts as she headed toward presenting her report to the UNHRC in June 2019.

The topic of the last plenary – an interactive session – was how technology can enable stronger connections between news sites and their audiences. Facilitated by Gayathry Venkiteswaran, it featured journalists Inday Espina-Varona from the Philippines, Melanio Escobar from Venezuela, and Can Dündar from Turkey.

Breakout sessions focussed on some of the dynamic, complex and evolving issues we all encounter in our defense of freedom of expression and information: When does being categorically against censorship ignore valid concerns of other groups and potential allies? In an increasingly polarized context, are we losing our capacity to reasonably debate with one another? How can we ensure that our calls for transparency don't jeopardize the principle of anonymity? When it comes to regulating tech companies, what approach is best? How can we include more diverse voices into the work we do? Where do our free expression rights intersect with youth rights? Can more flexible funding help counter the ravages of the closing of civic space on our organisations?

Invited guests and participants from outside the IFEX network, including a good number of Berlin-based activists, helped stimulate and enrich our conversations, push our boundaries, and transform our thinking.

We came together in Berlin to strengthen our resolve, mine our expertise, engage meaningfully with the issues and each other, and move forward together as a network committed to freedom

of expression. We are confident this was the case; our network is stronger, and our work is more important than ever.

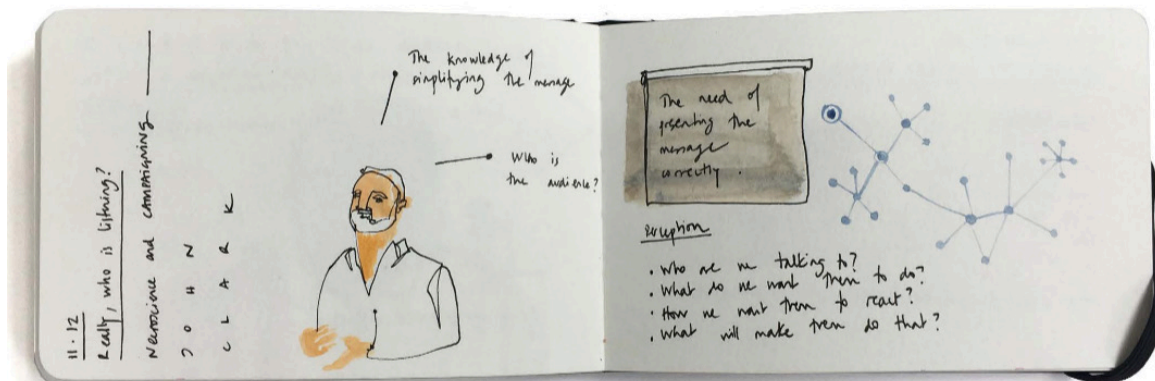
Prost!



95.3%
OF RESPONDENTS

checked off
“connecting
with other
organisations
and networks”
as one of the
most important
outcomes of their
participation in
their evaluation
of the Strategy
Conference.

Sketch from the Strategy Conference session “Really, Who is Listening?” by artist Miriam Sugranyes.



Defending members defending civic space

When it comes to directly supporting member and network strengthening, IFEX's Network Engagement team operates along a continuum. The work encompasses long-term planning – working with members to strengthen their organisational ability to achieve their stated goals and purpose; working with members trying to bolster their tactics in the face of a daily reality that is making the work anywhere from difficult to impossible; and responding to an urgent situation when an organisation or staff member is under immediate threat.

IFEX has long worked with members to reinforce their resistance to harassment and threats. In 2016, we started to make that work more structured. IFEX undertook to map the threats members were facing that were undermining – or threatened to undermine – their ability to function, and the types of support we were able to provide at that time.

Through this mapping process we learned that the **most serious risks** to IFEX members were:

- threats to the physical security of their staff as well as their workplace and operations
- issues involving digital security and the integrity of their communications
- challenges in resourcing their work
- shifts and changes in the broader political context in which they were working

These types of issues rarely occur in isolation. Typically, they call for strategies and mechanisms that provide support across several areas of risk at a given time.

The 2016 mapping revealed that within our existing program areas we had the resources to respond appropriately and effectively to the shifting contexts of members; what we needed to do was develop an approach that was holistic – designed to draw on all program areas to provide rapid response as well as longer-term, strategic support.

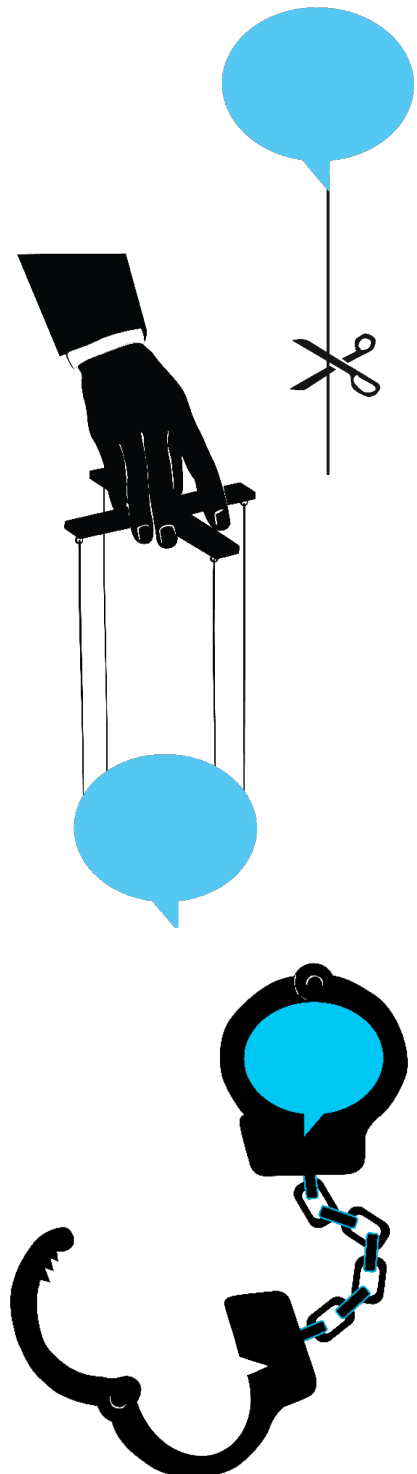
We called it the IFEX Emerging Issues Approach.

The approach enables us to work with members across our teams, consolidating our efforts by providing financial, coaching, and communications support and connecting members with expertise within the network and beyond. It's a two-pronged system, based on rapid response and resilience strengthening.

Rapid response refers to the limited or interim support to members we can provide to respond to urgent and emergency issues as they arise; this can be supplemented with further resilience strengthening support as appropriate. It is intended as a short-term response to high risk and high impact developments.

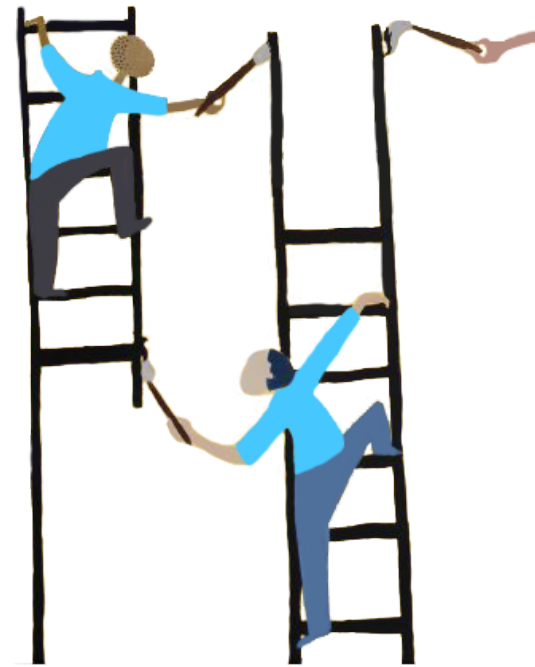
Resilience strengthening refers to the medium and long-term projects we can support that enhance a member's capacity to be resilient. It is intended as a response to low-to-medium risk and low-to-medium impact issues.

Our objective: to be able to reinforce members' efforts in immediately responding to and countering direct attacks on them in the short-term, while also working with them to identify what we can do together to ensure they are better able to manage and mitigate current and future threats to their ability to function in the medium- to long-term.



In 2018-2019 we created targeted **tools and resources** to help us do this work more effectively. These include:

- **The IFEX Global Rapid Response Protocol.** This is a roadmap – it outlines a step-by-step process for supporting members responding to urgent emerging issues that constitute a high level of risk and impact on the organisation’s ability to conduct its work.
- **The IFEX Members’ Emergency Fund Guide.** This outlines potential uses and approaches for financially supporting members responding to cases of urgent high risk and impact on an IFEX member.
- **The IFEX Resilience Strengthening Guide.** This outlines the ways IFEX can support members facing emerging issues that constitute a low-medium risk and impact on their organisation’s ability to conduct its work, and guides staff in their conversations with members to direct them to available support opportunities, tools, and resources.
- **The IFEX Emerging Issues Guide.** This was designed to provide a one-stop-shop for IFEX staff to consult if approached by IFEX members responding to emerging issues that constitute a risk to the members’ ability to conduct their work.



ON THE SPOT

IFEX supported 48 member organisations to engage in the following key global events:

- IFF – *Valencia, Spain*
- RightsCon – *Tunis, Tunisia*
- UNESCO event on the harassment of woman journalists – *Paris, France*
- UN HRC 41 side event on journalist safety in MENA – *Geneva, Switzerland*
- CocoNet II – *Manila, Philippines*
- Nicaragua Event – *Miami, USA*
- IACHR Event – *Quito, Ecuador*
- No to impunity for the crimes committed against journalists in the Arab region – *Beirut, Lebanon*
- OSCE 21st Central Asia Media Conference – *Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*
- IGF – *Berlin, Germany*
- UPR Advocacy Mission (Kyrgyzstan) – *Geneva, Switzerland*
- Human Rights Committee’s 127th session - reporting on digital attacks against Mexican journalists – *Geneva, Switzerland*
- Bread & Net – *Beirut, Lebanon*
- TRRC report seminar – *Banjul, Gambia*
- UPR Advocacy Mission (Nicaragua) – *Geneva, Switzerland*
- UPR Advocacy Mission (The Gambia) – *Geneva, Switzerland*
- SDG High-Level Event – *Geneva, Switzerland*
- National UPR consultations – *Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia*
- Preparatory Meeting for SDG High-Level Event – *Rome, Italy*
- Mission to NYC for UDAI resolution advocacy – *New York, USA*
- AU FoE declaration consultation meetings – *Africa*
- Police-Media Relations Forum – *Abuja, Nigeria*
- Journalism and free expression in Paraguay – *Asunción, Paraguay*
- RoundTable discussions with the General Prosecutor – *Bogota, Columbia*
- UNESCO IDEI Convening – *Mexico City, Mexico*

Digital dilemmas

While we continue to fight for an accessible and safe internet, we must also be vigilant against efforts to undermine or weaponize it through surveillance, shutdowns, censorship, restrictions, and information disorder. Civil society organisations, including IFEX members, are vulnerable to digital harassment and insecurity, even while they tackle these issues on behalf of others.

Building allies & sparking dialogue

For years, IFEX members have played a leading role defending and promoting open, safe, and equitable access to information online, its circulation and integrity. Our expanded communications focus on this area in 2019 was directly inspired by their lived experiences and their work.

Campaign snapshots

What can local media do to control the spread of false information online in a vibrant and diverse country with more than 260 million residents? How do you empower people to protect their rights against a massive government push to require the use of biometrics? In recognition of the importance and global relevance of information integrity and privacy, these questions were front and centre in the latest two IFEX member digital campaign snapshots.

For the first, we featured the efforts of the Software Freedom Law Center (SFLC.in) to ensure that people in India understood their privacy rights and the potential abuse of these rights by [Aadhar](#) – the country’s massive digital biometric identification system.

For the second, our spotlight was on the work of AJI (Alliance of Independent Journalists) on [CekFakta](#), a collaborative project to counter disinformation during Indonesia’s 2019 elections through real-time online fact-checking.

All six campaign snapshots available in our [series](#) amplify member campaigns and share lessons learned among the network and the wider rights community. They also draw potential new allies to members who are working in similar areas.

Explainers unpack the tech

Some of the technical aspects of online expression – threats, barriers, and work-arounds – can be complex. In 2019 we produced two explainers aimed specifically at cutting through some of that.

One focussed more on issues of access: [Where’d My Website Go?](#) broke down how content blocking and filtering works, and ways to circumvent it.

The focus of the second feature was privacy, and the vulnerability of our own information. For this we created an online quiz: [How much do you know about Surveillance?](#)

SUPPORTING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT IN DIGITAL RIGHTS SPACES

In 2019, IFEX provided advocacy grants for projects aimed at legislative change and for advocacy and campaigns to combat regressive cybercrime laws. We also supported member participation in key digital rights spaces, including:

- AFEX’s session at the African Internet Governance forum (IGF) “Regulating the Online Space in Africa”
- Karisma and ARTICLE 19 Mexico’s participation in a regional consultation “Freedom of Assembly and Association in Digital Spaces” with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly and association
- IFEX-ALC’s Coordinating Council’s participation in meeting of experts “Misinformation in Electoral Contexts”, organised by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur

Language matters

“Information disorder” is an umbrella term for a broad set of problems that are undermining the right to information, globally. It encompasses everything from someone unknowingly sharing a false post on their Facebook page, to systematic government-sponsored interference in another country’s elections. Or in their own country’s elections, for that matter.

It includes information that is false, and shared with the intent to harm (disinformation); false, but shared with no intent to harm (misinformation); and true - but shared with the intent to harm (mal-information).

Described this way, it’s obviously not a new phenomenon, nor unique to the online sphere. However, its impact has been exacerbated by the speed and scope of digital communications and the growing ease with which online information can be manipulated.

While the intent might be playful, malicious, or deadly, the effects are being felt in every corner of the world. Solutions need to involve all stakeholders. In this case, that means everyone.

Tackling the problem requires collaboration, and collaboration must be built on a foundation of awareness and understanding. This work has been hamstrung at times by imprecise language, as well as by the eager adoption of the phrase “Fake News” by authoritarian leaders to undermine independent media and demean all critical voices.

We are working to support a broader, firmer foundation of awareness and understanding of this problem. In 2019 we supplemented our ongoing series of digital campaign snapshots – each of which spotlights a member’s efforts to counter a threat to online expression – and our digitally-focused explainers with a series of original feature articles to strengthen people’s understanding of what information disorder is, how it is affecting different regions – and how to counter its ill-effects.

[Disinformation wars: From the stupid to the malign](#), [Disinformation, elections, fact-checking and beyond: the view from Latin America](#), and [Combating disinformation in Asia Pacific: Intended – and unintended – consequences](#) were published in the fall of 2019. The series will continue in 2020, with features on Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa.



82%

OF RESPONDENTS agree that IFEX disseminates information that adds value and is effective in fostering deeper understanding of freedom of expression and information.



Strengthening digital security in Asia Pacific

In 2019, IFEX held a convening on digital security strengthening for the widespread and richly diverse group of IFEX members in Asia & Pacific.

We brought Asia Pacific members together for a convening in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in November 2019. Building on what we learned in 2018 from convening digital security exchanges for Europe and Central Asia members and members in the Middle East and North Africa, we strove to create a space where members could learn from each other – sharing best practices in information safety, creating solidarity through their commonalities, and getting into the gritty technical details of digital security.

Twenty-three participants from 19 organisations brought a diverse range of expertise – including the safety of journalists, human rights, media freedom, women’s and LGBTQI+ advocacy and digital issues – to the gathering, which included staff from the IFEX secretariat and two digital security specialists, for two full days of exchange, relationship-building and practical learning.

Responding to what members had cited as their primary needs and interests, day one was dedicated to technical skills-building for digital security. Participants spent time mapping their digital identities, sharing expertise around the best apps and software to utilize in their work, how to improve mobile security, and how to deliver digital security workshops within their own organisations, among an array of other practical skills.

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I found the risk assessment of current political climates in the Asia Pacific region useful. It provided the context and explained why it’s critical for our organisations to have policies in place to protect our communication channels and protect our data.

–PARTICIPANT IN SAFER COMMUNICATION CONVENING, KUALA LUMPUR

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The second day centred around relationship-building and collaboration. Participants shared the human rights contexts and trends in their countries, identified similar or divergent trends and discussed ways to collaborate and work together.

Considering the overwhelming influence of gender on digital security, we had worked with the facilitators to incorporate this theme and weave it throughout the full two days of sessions, making sure to touch upon the multiple intersections between gender and digital security.

The meeting also served as a springboard for members to increase their engagement with IFEX, to work more closely with digital security specialists, identify their specific vulnerabilities, and develop strategies to mitigate them.



The right to information

Expression and information are two sides of the same coin. Promoting and defending the right to access and share information and ideas, without fear, is a constant theme in our work. Whether promoting the safety of journalists or working to bring to account those who commit crimes to silence them, advocating against criminal defamation, countering online abuse, questioning over-zealous content moderation policies or fighting censorship and internet shutdowns – our fundamental right to access information is at stake.

All of this contributed to our decision to position securing the right to information as one of our three thematic goals in IFEX's new 2020-2024 Strategic Plan.

The path to an International Day

In 2019 we witnessed the culmination of years of advocacy aimed at promoting access to information through legislation, public awareness and the establishment of 28 September as the International Day for Universal Access to Information – and IFEX members in Africa played a huge role.

The path to this historic day can be traced back to Windhoek, Namibia, a decade ago, following a continental conference marking the 20th anniversary of the [Windhoek Declaration](#). Driven by the belief that access to information could transform Africa, advocates formed the Windhoek +20 campaign, which soon evolved into the [African Platform on Access to Information](#) (APAI).

Several IFEX members joined the APAI Working Group in those [early days](#), including the Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC), Article 19 (East and West Africa), Media Rights Agenda (MRA), the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), and the Federation of African Journalists (the African affiliate of IFEX member the International Federation of Journalists.)

By 2018 the campaign had reached a pivotal moment, with several major successes achieved, but a tough fight ahead to convince UN member states

to declare an official International Right to Information Day.

At the beginning of the year, AFIC had succeeded in working with core member state sponsors to complete a draft United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution proclaiming September 28 as the International Day for Universal Access to Information.

We were also able to support AFIC's participation in the High-Level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at UN Headquarters in July 2019, where they used the momentum and focus on SDG 16.10, with its indicator on the adoption of access to information legislation, to organise additional advocacy to convince UN Member States to support the proposed UNGA resolution.

In the run-up to the vote on 15 October 2019, AFIC maintained contact with confirmed sponsors and UNESCO, incorporating best practices and lessons learned around the importance of coalition building, physical contacts with

different stakeholders, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The rest is history: the resolution was [adopted unanimously](#) with 29 sponsoring countries, including many lobbied directly by AFIC.

Truly this was a global victory driven by African campaigners – and one from which the whole world will benefit. At IFEX, we marked this historic milestone with the launch of a new [original content series](#) and social media campaign on regional experiences with the global problem of information disorder, and efforts to counter it.

Having witnessed the power that having an International Day to End Impunity has had to rally organisations and focus attention, our hope is that the new International Day for Universal Access to Information will provide a similar impetus for states to reflect on their commitments, and to work with civil society organisations and other stakeholders to ensure those commitments are met.

Pausing to focus on network structure

IFEX members are the network's greatest strength. Over the past few years, IFEX has organically experienced rapid membership growth. In the face of further potential growth and with finite resources, there is concern about continuing our collaborative work and culture of close, trusting relationships. As such, we are taking a step back to strategise and rethink our membership structure to best serve our FoE&I aims moving forward.

IFEX is open to organisations from around the world that share its vision to uphold, protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. Our goal is to attract members that bring expertise, experience and diversity to IFEX; who will engage in the network and, as part of it, contribute to the evolution of a strong and effective global free expression community.

The network has become more visible, and as a result IFEX has experienced a steady growth in membership. From 2015 to 2019 the network grew from 89 members to 121, and was projected to reach 165 by 2024. An expansion of such magnitude would have an impact on the network solidarity and culture that members value, and on the resources and capacity of the Secretariat to deliver the quality of programs members currently access.

We had been aware of this for some time. We began to have in-depth discussions with the IFEX Council about it, and made it part of the agenda for IFEX's Network Think Big Tank meeting in December 2018.

IFEX wants to ensure that any future growth directly supports the achievement of its strategic goals, without sacrificing the aspects of the network that current members value.

In 2019, the IFEX Council took the unanimous decision to put the membership application process on hold in order to develop a new membership strategy. The fact that so many members cautioned against unbridled network growth in the 2019 evaluation process provided additional support for this decision.

A Membership Working Group was formed to research and draft

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Expanding too much [in membership] might break up the strong connection and bond that has made IFEX unique from other networks and organisations.

—STRATEGIC PLAN EVALUATION

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a new membership strategy. It is incorporating diversity and inclusivity considerations in a number of ways, including data collection considerations during the research process and also through the agreed criteria for membership. The plan is to have the new strategy ready to present to members for any changes needed to the IFEX by-laws in 2021.

