

Outrage at Nigerian media bill

 By Louise Marsland

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Media rights groups in Nigeria are condemning a bill that will regulate the practice of journalism in the West African country and media executives called on the Nigerian Senate to repeal the bill. Leading the charge were newspaper publishers, broadcasters, editors and journalists.



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According to the *Premium Times* of Nigeria, the Nigerian Senate has pushed the Nigerian Press Council Amendment Bill through its second reading this year, “eliciting widespread outrage from media practitioners who identified it as an attempt to revive some of the relics of dictatorship that freedom lovers thought modernisation and democracy had consigned to the dustbin of history”.

The *Premium Times* further reported that the controversial bill has been condemned as “draconian, primitive and unconstitutional” by the Newspaper Proprietors’ Association of Nigeria, the Nigeria Guild of Editors, the Nigerian Union of Journalists and the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria, all members of the Nigerian Press Organisation.

“The proposed bill is unconstitutional as it runs against the principles and tenets of the rule of law and is actually *sub judice* given that a case on the subject matter is still pending in the highest court of the land – the Supreme Court – in view of which the bill should not have been drafted in the first instance,” the groups said in a joint statement to *Premium Times*.

According to Nigeria's *Vanguard*, the chairman of the Newspapers Proprietors' Association of Nigeria (NPAN) and president of the Nigerian Press Organisation, Nduka Obaigbena, urged the Senate to "borrow from best practices in other jurisdictions that have expressly provided for and guaranteed press freedom without any form of government interference".

This Day in Nigeria also reported that the media stakeholders called on the Nigerian National Assembly to provide "an enabling environment for the media to thrive in the exercise of its constitutional obligations as spelt out in Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended)... By passing laws that will promote transparency, accountability and open government, such as mandatory delivery of the State of the Nation address by the President, and State of the State address by the governor on specified days of the years".

The media organisations also accused the government of seeking to "indoctrinate" Nigerians "through the use and misuse" of curricula in the training of journalists and "usurping the powers" of regulatory bodies in the education sector.

"The Bill seeks to create the impression that the Nigerian media community does not take the issues of ethics and self-regulation seriously, whereas the mechanisms actually exist, including the Code of Conduct for Journalists in Nigeria, the Ethics Committees of the NUJ and NGE, and the recently launched Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage endorsed by stakeholders," it was further reported in *This Day*.

Since 2015, the Muhammadu Buhari regime has been accused of attacking freedom of speech in Nigeria by trying to put measures in place to regulate the mainstream media, as well as social media activities.

Additional sources: AllAfrica.com.

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