



Commonwealth Journalists Association

NEWSLETTER

December 2025

President's Report

CJA President Chris Cobb writes:

The late great Canadian poet-songwriter Leonard Cohen wrote in his song Anthem:

"There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in."

It's a song that speaks to finding hope and beauty in imperfection. And imperfection is a mild word to describe much of the political leadership that darkens our world as 2025 fades among the bleaker annals of recorded history.

For me, that 'crack' appeared during the past few weeks and grew wider as I read through more than 50 entries to the 2025 Commonwealth Youth Awards.

It's a privilege for me to be one of the judges.

Candidates are required to demonstrate that their work furthers the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. That means working to improve the lives of others.

Also included is the inaugural Patsy Robertson Award for Outstanding Communications Skills in Advancing Community Development and Peace. Patsy was a long time CJA UK member.

Entrants are all under 30. They are from across the Commonwealth - most from African nations, India and Pakistan but also from Canada, Australia and the UK.

They have created organizations dedicated to improving the lives of people in their own communities. Some have spread their work wider, a few nationally with aspirations to become international.

Some have had modest financial support, others have self-financed.

Helping those in remote areas is a common theme. Improving water quality; providing cooling systems for drug storage where power outages or no power at all is common; menstrual health hygiene for young girls; malaria prevention; education in basic law and justice.

The list is long and inspiring. The achievements are awesome more so because it's younger people who are trying their best to drive change and improve the lives of those so often abandoned by their political leaders.

The financial award for the winners is modest, the exposure likely of greater value but the light of hope they are bringing into the lives of others is priceless.

ON A DARKER NOTE

As 2025 fades, a reminder that dozens of Bangladeshi journalists - many prominent, main ailing - are still languishing in jail on trumped up charges of inciting murder. After 18 months, they have yet to face trial.

Their detention has brought widespread, vigorous condemnation from international journalists and human rights groups.

In November, Secretary General Shirley Botchwey visited Bangladesh.

She met with Bangladeshi government's unelected Chief Adviser (aka leader) Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain (among others) to discuss the Commonwealth's role in supporting Bangladesh's "national journey" toward an inclusive and prosperous future.

All quite noble and necessary goals.

If Botchwey, a skilled diplomat, mentioned to these leaders that rounding up and jailing journalists might not be the best advert for a democratic country - and certainly not one claiming to embrace Commonwealth principles - there was no mention of it in the official communique or whispers of it elsewhere.

But in diplomacy, hard truths are usually delivered privately. Eventually, we will know whether they were delivered at all.

I wish all our readers a healthy and joyful 2026.

Chris Cobb is CJA President

CJA executive member William Horsley writes:

Key UN body warns of “historic decline in free expression” – so where’s the Commonwealth?

On 15 December, UNESCO, the UN agency for freedom of expression, published its [World Trends in freedom of expression and media development 2022/2025](#). The [full 216-page report](#) points to “a historic 10 percent decline worldwide in free speech and the safety of journalists” in the past four years. In many respects UNESCO’s global analysis echoes the findings of the [Who Controls the Narrative?](#) report published in September by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the CJA and the Commonwealth Lawyers Association. [Our joint report](#) likewise identified a growing range and intensity of attacks targeting journalists – physical, digital and legal – especially within the 56 Commonwealth countries; and an alarming rise in self-censorship due to the fear of reprisals among journalists who report on corruption and official on serious abuses of human rights.

Wherever you look – for example in Bangladesh, Cameroon, Gambia, India, Pakistan, Rwanda or Tanzania – intimidation and acts of violence directed against independent media workers and other critical voices are key elements in the constitutional and election-related crises seen in Commonwealth states in recent times. It is worth noting - for its rarity - that the [Concluding Statement issued on 5 December 2025](#) by the nine foreign ministers who make up the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, CMAG, spelled out their deep concern over the deteriorating situation pre- and post- the latest elections in Tanzania. The statement mentioned “reports of breaches to the fundamental values and principles of the Commonwealth, including the respect of human rights and the freedom of expression, democracy, rule of law, and good governance”. It set out four conditions the Tanzanian government is required to fulfil – including the lifting of restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression, civil society and the media – for Tanzania to avoid being placed on the formal agenda of the next CMAG meeting in March 2026 with the implied threat of more drastic sanctions.

The statement is very welcome, especially if it signals an intent by Secretary-General Shirley Botchwey and CMAG to take a clear and unequivocal stance in future when dealing with other serious “breaches of fundamental principles” by Commonwealth member states of all shapes and sizes. But does it? My opinion article published by the Commonwealth Round Table in October is entitled [The Commonwealth and the art of How Not To Do It](#).

The column reflects deep frustration that the declaration by Heads of Government at the 2024 CHOGM in Samoa that “Member states should promote the widest possible awareness” of [the Commonwealth Media Principles](#) and “ensure their observance” has until now proved only empty words. However, throughout the past nine years of hard work, the CJA and its partner organisations have made clear they are ready to assist the Commonwealth to change in fundamental ways so does not sink into irrelevance or come to be seen as “part of the problem” of democratic backsliding. The latest CMAG statement seems to offer at least a ray of hope.



The Press Gazette reports: Keyword search dying, video search is future says Sky News boss

The Press Gazette interviewed heads of Sky News, ITN and Euronews at Web Summit.

Press Gazette hosted a discussion on the future of broadcast news featuring Sky News executive chairman David Rhodes, [ITN](#) CEO Rachel Corp and Euronews chairman Pedro Vargas David.

UK satellite news channel Sky News has embraced a 'video-first' model as part of its [Project 2030 bid to expand its audience and become more financially sustainable](#).

Asked whether [YouTube](#) and TikTok can support high-quality broadcast news in the future, Rhodes said: "In terms of the value our corporation gets from the investment, it's great value. There is a real market for news on the platforms you refer to.

"We've had, in the last seven days, 100 million TikTok video views. We see these platforms as an important audience acquisition tool and increasingly we see good actual financial outcomes from engaging with those audiences."

 More at: [Press Gazette](#)



UPDATES FROM CJA BRANCHES

Malaysia: Sarawak branch elects a new chair



October: Nancy Nais elected new chair of Commonwealth Journalists Association Sarawak

The Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA) Sarawak branch has elected Nancy Nais as its new chairwoman for the 2025–2027 term.

She succeeds Alice Wee, who had led the branch since 2015.

Outlining her vision, Nancy said the new committee will focus on ethical reporting standards, professional development, and international collaboration.

“The role of journalists is especially critical today, with unprecedented challenges. I look forward to supporting our members and encouraging excellence in storytelling,” she said.

Meanwhile, outgoing chairwoman Alice reflected on the association’s achievements under her tenure — including educational media workshops and the successful ‘Breaking News Run’, organised with the Kuching Division Journalist Association (KDJA), which drew some 600 participants.

Full details at: [🔗 Borneo Post](#)



United
Kingdom

CJA-UK Chair Raymond Whitaker writes:

Raymond Whitaker writes: Mid-career journalists from the Commonwealth can apply to spend 10 weeks at Wolfson College, Cambridge, from 13 April 2026 to research a project of relevance to the media, all expenses paid.

The Derek Ingram Press Fellowship, now in its third year, honours the memory of Derek Ingram, a co-founder of the Commonwealth Journalists Association and a staunch defender of media freedom.

[More on the Fellowship at Applications invited for renowned Ingram Press Fellowship - C J A](#).

Full details of the fellowship, testimonials from previous fellows – who came from Pakistan, Kenya and India – as well as how to apply, can be found on the Wolfson College website:

[Applications open for fully-funded Derek Ingram Press Fellowship](#)

CJA UK also discussed *Reparations for slavery: The moral and economic dues* at its annual lecture held at the Palace of Westminster, London. Details of the event can be found at [Reparations for slavery: Our CJA Lecture delves into the moral and economic dues - C J A](#)



CJA Uganda

Alice Drito writes: Uganda’s highest communications regulatory authority, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has issued a stern warning against use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to access Facebook.

The UCC said that VPN users and other online communication networks, as well as the internet, are constantly under a complex spyware surveillance system. The Commission added that users risk being prosecuted when it comes to compromising national interest and regulatory standards.

The warning from UCC Director of Legal Affairs, Dr Waiswa Abudu, was made at a press conference with key stakeholders of 2026 elections management on 4 December, 2025 at Nairobi’s Sheraton Hotel.

On 1 December, President Yoweri Museveni in an interview said he may consider opening up Facebook access after a five-year ban but under clear terms and conditions. Government blocked Facebook after it deleted hundreds of accounts of the ruling party, National Resistance Movement (NRM) supporters that is said it suspected to be fake during the general elections in 2021.

Facebook significantly impacts digital journalism and blocking it has been an obstruction to media freedom. The authorities continue to defend their blocking of some social media platforms as being in the national interest, driving people to resort to use of alternative avenues like VPNs to by-pass censorship or legal threats.

The move by the regulatory body to threaten legal penalties over the use of VPNs and social media platforms will deepen restrictions on critical reporting, silence diverse opinions and voices and can compromise healthy democratic debate during the election process.

It will further impose a fear of potential repercussions and generally restrict fundamental human rights and the right to free speech and access to public information.

Journalists in Uganda have raised their concerns over criminalizing the use of VPNs, pointing out that this may be yet another systematic way to block other social media platforms ahead of general elections due on 15 January 2026.

Journalists and civic society have also continued to raise the issue of digital safety and protection of journalists. The areas of concern range from anti-media laws, regulations, high legal fees, legal threats, cyber policing, cyber harassment and abuse from cyber mobs, as well as the monitoring of journalists using sophisticated spyware systems.

The exorbitant operating license fees levied on media houses have left most of them struggling financially. There are also the continued issues of the exploitation of freelance journalists, reported cases of harassment, intimidation, assaults on journalists and state security operatives harassing journalists under the guise of media protection.

Civil society groups have called for the full unlocking of the country's media space. They have argued that it is the competition of ideas or opinions on a range of social media platforms that will help the electorate make informed decisions and choices in a free and fair democratic space, in an atmosphere where positive tolerance of different ideas and opinions are on display.



Africa

The Conversation Africa writes:

South Africa needs to rethink its community media policy - 4 ways to close the gaps

Community media have received support for around three decades, and yet South Africa's information landscape remains deeply unequal.

The distribution of media closely matches the country's [socio-economic inequality](#). People in middle-class suburbs have access to an ever-growing range of information sources. Poorer areas and the countryside are often news deserts.

Sustained support for community media has undoubtedly led to growth in media in marginalised areas. Around 230 community radio stations are currently licensed, [according to the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa](#). The [Association of Independent Publishers](#) lists around 190 print and online members.

However, many are enterprises battling simply to survive.

More at: [🔗 The Conversation](#)



Nigeria

Global Voices writes: How censorship is limiting digital development in Nigeria

The Nigerian government is weaponizing cybersecurity laws to intimidate critics and suppress online dissent.

More at: [🔗 Global Voices](#)

The CPJ writes: Nigerian authorities detain another journalist for cybercrimes over governance reports

The Committee to Protect Journalists calls on Nigerian authorities to release journalist Friday James Alefia, who has been in

detention since September on cybercrime charges, for which he could face up to three years in jail.

“Nigerian authorities should swiftly drop the cybercrime charges against journalist Friday James Alefia, who has been sick and required hospital treatment since he was taken into custody in September,” said CPJ Africa Director Angela Quintal. “Nigerian authorities must stop criminalizing the press and act urgently to prevent police and politicians intimidating journalists who report critically on governance issues.”

More at:  cpj.org



Rwanda

Deutsche Welle writes: Rwandan journalist draws ire of political top brass

Freedom of speech in Rwanda is under the spotlight after a high-ranking politician publicly ordered a journalist to delete social media opinions on diplomatically thorny topics.

 More at: [Deutsche Welle](https://www.dw.com)



Asia

India

The International Federation of Journalists writes: New data law threatens press freedom

India's controversial Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 came into effect on November 14 amid backlash from critics who say the law will increase government surveillance, restrict freedom of information, and weaken press freedom. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) joins its affiliate, the Indian Journalists Union (IJU), in seeking a thorough review of the law in consultation with media stakeholders.

 More at: [International Federation of Journalists](#)

The Committee to protect journalists writes: Police in the Indian-administered territory of Jammu and Kashmir must return any documents or other property seized during Thursday's raid on the Kashmir Times, reported by [multiple news outlets](#), and ensure that members of the news outlet are not threatened with criminal charges for their work, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.

“Reports of a raid on the Kashmir Times office are deeply troubling and raise concerns about increasing pressure on media outlets in Jammu and Kashmir,” said CPJ Asia-Pacific Program Coordinator Kunal Majumder. “Authorities must clearly explain the legal basis for this action and ensure that any investigation is conducted with transparency and full respect for due process. News outlets should not face punitive action simply for doing their journalistic work.”

 More at: [cpj.org](#)



Pakistan

The Committee to Protect Journalists writes: Pakistani authorities must immediately release journalist Sohrab Barkat, drop all pending charges against him, and cease intimidating members of the press, the Committee to Protect Journalists said on Tuesday.

Barkat, an Islamabad-based correspondent for Pakistani news outlet Siasat and the host of his own [YouTube channel](#), was detained at Islamabad International Airport on his way to a United Nations conference on November 26, said multiple [news reports](#) and the journalist's lawyer, Saad Rasool, who spoke to CPJ via a messaging app.

The National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) registered a case against Barkat on August 5, alleging he had made “derogatory remarks” and spread misinformation about state institutions, according to news outlet [Dawn](#) and a court document reviewed by CPJ. Rasool said the allegedly insulting remarks were made by Sanam Javed, a member of the main opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, in an interview with Barkat published on Siasat's YouTube channel.

“The detention of journalist Sohrab Barkat is yet another disturbing example of Pakistani authorities harassing the media,” said CPJ Asia-Pacific Director Beh Lih Yi.

 More at: cpj.org

From the Rural Media Network Pakistan:

October, Uchsharif: Press clubs presidents of three districts were invited by the Rural Media Network Pakistan (RMNP) on the request of the organiser Daily Nawa-i-Ahmedpur Sharqia to attend the Journalists Alliance Convention held in Uch Sharif. RMNP President Ehsan Ahmed Sehar himself moderated the convention, which was attended by more than two hundred journalists representing twelve press clubs from Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, and Muzaffargarh districts, along with the Ahmedpur Union of Journalists. A total of twenty-six speakers addressed the convention, making it a significant event aimed at promoting unity, solidarity, and professional cooperation among journalists in Southern Punjab.

The participants pledged to continue their collective efforts for the defence of press freedom, the promotion of freedom of expression, and the welfare of journalists working in rural and small-town areas of the region.

 More at: [Rural media network](#)



Europe

UK

The Press Gazette writes: Newspaper columnists and BBC execs becoming more elitist, research finds. Media remains one of UK's most elitist industries according to the Sutton Trust.

There has been a drop in the number of privately educated leaders in UK media but the industry remains “highly unrepresentative” of the public overall, a new report has found.

Newspaper columnists have a “particularly stark” class disparity compared to the UK population, with “little sign of progress” among those interpreting the news for audiences.

The 2025 Elitist Britain report from social mobility charity found that the gap is “particularly prominent” among a selection of 100 news media leaders, plus samples of columnists, political commentators, BBC executives and podcasters.

These groups are all “disproportionately more privately educated than the general population” with nearly half having attended a Russell Group university (a group of 24 prestigious institutions) and at least 20% who went to Oxford or Cambridge universities (together known as Oxbridge).

[More at: Press Gazette](#)

Trump and the BBC

Latest to publication: Politico: British government backs the BBC as Trump sues for billions. More at: [Politico](#)

[Let's all stand up for the BBC](#) – The Independent UK

Previously:

BBC apologises to Trump over Panorama edit but refuses to pay compensation More at: [BBC News](#)

Background material mentioned at the Parliamentary Culture Committee enquiry: Mark Urban Substack:

[Liberal bias us?](#) and

[BBC is in deep crisis](#)

More at:

- [🔗 Trump Panaroma legal threat](#)
- [🔗 How Donald Trump blew up the BBC](#)
- [🔗 Inside the year-long BBC saga that led to Trump's \\$1bn lawsuit threat](#)



Pacific

Samoa

[The Samoa Observer writes](#) in an editorial of 18 November:

Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa Leuatea Schmidt's recent remarks about banning the Samoa Observer, paired with his stated commitment to a free and vibrant press, reflect a contradiction at the heart of this decision. On one hand, he says he values media freedom. On the other hand, he is shutting out one of the nation's key news voices.

More on this at:

- [🔗 Samoa Observer](#)
- [🔗 Global Voices](#)
- [🔗 Prime minister has accused the Samoa Observer of inaccurate reporting during his eight-week medical stay in New Zealand.](#)
- [🔗 The International Federation of Journalists](#)



AND FINALLY...

YouTube's CEO is Time magazine's CEO of the year. In his interview with Time, he stated that "the dynamics of the entire media industry are changing before our eyes...It's incredibly disruptive, and if you don't adapt, you can be left by the wayside."

 More at: Time.com



**SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM THE CJA
NEWSLETTER TEAM**

If you'd like to contribute or make a suggestion to the CJA newsletter team, please email us. Debbie is available at debbieransome@gmail.com.

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