



Commonwealth Journalists Association

NEWSLETTER

September 2026

President's Report

CJA President Chris Cobb writes:

As the Commonwealth prepares for its leaders' summit – also known as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) – it's a perfect opportunity for a re-assessment.

What is the point of the Commonwealth?

Ask Google what is the point of the Commonwealth and it takes you to Wikipedia.

The Commonwealth of Nations is a voluntary group of 56 independent countries that work together for peace, democracy, and economic growth.

The Commonwealth, it adds, doesn't pass laws for its members or rule over them. Instead, it's sort of a supportive club focusing on things like trade and the support of democracy.

All of that is theoretically true. Too often, the reality doesn't match the promise. It's a frustration for those who believe in the Commonwealth, and its potential.

Commonwealth countries routinely contravene the democratic values they faithfully promised to protect.

Supporting and practising democratic values are supposed to be part of the price of membership.

Instead, we see elections masquerading as free and fair, controlled by leaders who load electoral systems to ensure their perpetuity and harass (or worse) political opponents and journalists who challenge them.

Example:

The CJA and many other civil society groups have spent thousands of words and hours of energy these past months demanding justice for journalists imprisoned in Bangladesh on trumped up murder charges.

The charges for some have now been upgraded to crimes against humanity. It isn't only journalists they've targeted. The newish government appears to have embarked on a campaign of revenge when the country desperately needs a leadership laser-focused on fixing the country, making life better for its people, and getting the help it needs.

The collapse of the previous regime was nothing to lament but what's the point of a regime obsessed with chasing the past instead of embracing the future.

Nelson Mandela, who had more reason and opportunity than most to seek revenge, commented on the choice between vengeance vs. nation-building:

"Revenge-seeking minds destroy states," he said. "Reconciliation builds nations. Courageous people embrace forgiveness for peace."

The Commonwealth doesn't rule Bangladesh or any other member, but it does have influence to engage in diplomatic arm twisting and the ability to suspend membership until the errant member decides to follow the rules. It's been done before.

Unfortunately, what we hear from the Commonwealth Secretariat is the sound of silence. Any back channel diplomacy has either failed or never existed.

The CJA, and this column, is about journalism and making our voices heard when journalists are threatened and persecuted. Others can comment on the Commonwealth's performance in other areas.

It's worth recalling that at their last summit, leaders chose to adopt a set of news media principles painstakingly developed over years by the CIA, and others, to enshrine the safety of journalists across the Commonwealth.

It's a comprehensive document that the leaders deserved credit for adopting. But if they aren't willing to implement and abide by those principles, what's the point?

Chris Cobb, CJA President



Good news story: My Ten Weeks as a Derek Ingram Press Fellow at Wolfson College, University of Cambridge

Dr Amir Ali Bhat from Kashmir shares his recent fellowship experience.



“When I received an email informing me that I had been selected as a Derek Ingram Press Fellow for 2026, hosted by Wolfson College, University of Cambridge, in partnership with the [CJA], my joy knew no bounds. As a journalist and researcher from Kashmir, a region shaped by prolonged conflict and restrictions, I had been striving for this opportunity for many years. [...] By the end of the fellowship, I realised that its impact was far more than another achievement on my CV. It broadened the scope of my work, renewed my confidence, and deepened my commitment to journalism

 [Read Amir's full report](#)



Sharp international concerns after Malta court acquits suspect in journalist's murder; William Horsley writes:

Almost nine years after the shocking murder of Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in October 2017, public figures and advocacy groups have expressed outrage and concern following the acquittal by a Maltese court on 2 September of the powerful businessman Jorgen Fenech, who had been charged with [complicity in her murder and criminal association to commit murder](#). During the trial the jury heard that Fenech had wanted the journalist killed because she was about to reveal information about him. Three other men have been convicted of carrying out the killing and two for supplying the bomb. The family of the murdered journalist declared: ‘Nine years after Daphne’s brutal assassination,

the institutional failures that enabled her murder remain unaddressed” and they would seek to appeal against the acquittal. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) demanded “Full justice must be served, and Maltese authorities must implement the long overdue measures protecting journalists and media freedom - the absence of these measures contributed to Daphne’s murder”.

UK peer Baroness Shami Chakrabarti, who is preparing a report on [Daphne’s murder and subsequent events in Malta](#) for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe’s Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, called for justice to be done and cited the conclusions of [an independent inquiry in Malta](#) in 2021. It found that the Maltese state must “shoulder responsibility” for Daphne’s killing because it had created a climate of impunity emanating from the highest levels of the government which spread to its institutions and police. Chakrabarti deplored Malta’s failure to implement many of the required judicial and administrative reforms. On September 10 the [European Parliament’s Monitoring Group on Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights](#) announced it will conduct a fact-finding mission and step up scrutiny of Malta.

The [CJA has repeatedly called on the Commonwealth](#) to use its authority to speak out against targeted acts of violence against journalists and work with civil society groups to repair systemic weaknesses in governance in the 56 member states which underpin the extraordinarily high (96 percent) rate of impunity demonstrated in figures published by [UNESCO’s Observatory of Killed Journalists](#).

Maltese communities across Europe have called for [protests under the banner ‘Justice Denied’](#) in London and other capitals to mark the ninth anniversary of Daphne Caruana Galizia’s death on October 16.



Daphne bomb murder site - [CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International](#)

 [CJA “shocked” after acquittal of key suspect in Maltese journalist’s 2017 murder](#)



 Ahead of CHOGM in Antigua & Barbuda, CJA has some informal thoughts:

The CJA strongly believes that the [Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media](#) as adopted at the 2024 Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa should be used to give the Commonwealth a renewed sense of purpose as a force to protect freedom of speech and democracy, which are under severe pressure worldwide. In their Communiqué the leaders urged member states to “take concrete and meaningful steps” to implement the Principles in their domestic legal frameworks. **Practical actions must follow.**

Recent statements by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, expressing concerns about large-scale political violence and the repression of legitimate civil society movements in several member states, underline the urgent need for the Commonwealth to deliver practical and far-reaching responses to these challenges. The formal [2026 CHOGM agenda](#), the traditional Leaders Retreat, and the scheduled Side Events and public Peoples Forum meetings all offer helpful opportunities for the member states to take steps which would show that the public commitments they have made are not only empty words.

Ground-breaking research: The wide gap between the public commitments made and on-the-ground realities was illuminated in the 2025 research publication [Who Controls the Narrative? Legal Restrictions on Freedom of Expression in the Commonwealth](#), by the CHRI, CJA and CLA. It included first-hand testimonies from media practitioners and in-depth analysis by a team of legal experts. The study showed that outdated criminal laws are still widely used to deter public interest reporting in the majority of member states. And the extraordinarily high (96 percent) rate of impunity observed in cases over the past 20 years when journalists have been killed in Commonwealth jurisdictions (UNESCO figures) points to widespread failings of judicial independence and the rule of law. These flaws are bound to undermine the Commonwealth’s credibility unless they are honestly recognised, addressed and corrected.

Dynamic partnerships: In view of these things, the CJA urges the Commonwealth to use its convening power to advance the goals set in the 2024 Leaders' Communique. That requires that the Secretariat is directed to work in dynamic partnerships with civil society and member states to bring standards of protection for freedom of expression, media freedom and other basic rights into alignment with those enshrined in international law.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which represents legislators in all the member countries, states in the current issue of its journal *The Parliamentarian* that "it is vital that Parliamentarians take a stand for media freedom" in the name of good governance. In this article, members of parliament are called on to press for a practical set of reforms to outdated legislation and accountability mechanisms which would make a real difference: [How Can Parliamentarians Ensure That Media Freedoms Are Upheld?](#)



🧠 Journalists' meeting asks: can human rights and international law prevail?



Veronika Fikfak copyright <https://ivanweiss.london> and Fergal Keane

That question will be debated on 29 September at a meeting in London of the Association of European Journalists (AEJ), a sister organisation of the CJA. As the USA seeks to dismantle the International Criminal Court, and other powers openly challenge human rights institutions, are war crimes and genocide being normalised? Wars like those in the Middle East and between Russia and Ukraine reflect a slide to authoritarianism that threatens fundamental rights, including the role of journalists in



holding the powerful to account. Will the post-World War Two framework of international law prove strong enough to prevent the rise of autocracy and the suppression of dissent and critical opinions? The event will feature leading international jurist Veronika Fikfak and acclaimed British war reporter Fergal Keane and will be co-hosted by the AEJ and University College London. A video recording will be posted on the [AEJ website](#) after the meeting.

 Podcast: *In the age of misinformation, disinformation and artificial intelligence, where does the truth lie?*

The Commonwealth Journalists Association (represented by **William Horsley**) and the Commonwealth Correspondents Network came together to discuss the biggest issues facing the international media - the growing role of digital journalism in shaping public discourse, and the opportunities digital platforms provide for under-reported voices and communities.

 Watch the discussion here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJFfH5uItwA>



NEW DIGITAL MEDIA
...telling untold stories

CJA
Commonwealth Journalists Association

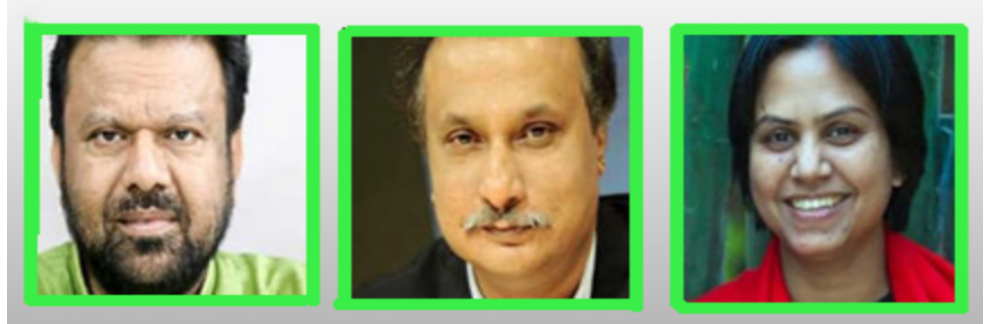
YOUR COMMONWEALTH
The Commonwealth Correspondents Network

In the age of misinformation, disinformation and artificial intelligence, where does the truth lie?

The Commonwealth Journalists Association and the Commonwealth Correspondents Network have come together to look at the future of the media, with a team of international journalists. Watch the discussion at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJFfH5uItwA>.

 Chimaobi Omeje, Nigeria <i>Journalist covering international relations and media freedom</i>	 William Horsley, UK <i>Media rights, Ex-foreign correspondent</i>	 Evans Ijaka, Kenya <i>Journalist covering global affairs, human rights</i>	 Shuchita Jha, India <i>Environmental and human rights activist</i>
--	---	--	--

Statement by the Commonwealth Journalists Association in response to the latest oppressive legal moves against three prominent journalists in Bangladesh



24 August 2026

The Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA) strongly condemns the decision of Bangladesh’s International Crimes Tribunal on Monday, August 24, 2026, to order three senior journalists to continue to be held in jail until their case comes to trial in connection with a “crimes against humanity” case relating to the July 2024 uprising.

The journalists, pictured above, are **Shyamal Dutta**, former editor of Bhorer Kagoj and **Vice President of the Commonwealth Journalists Association**; Mozammel Haq Babu, Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief of Ekattor TV; and Farzana Rupa, Chief Correspondent of Ekattor TV.

The CJA is particularly alarmed by the apparent basis of the allegations against the journalists. According to the prosecution, the case relates, among other things, to a press conference held by then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Ganabhaban on July 14, 2024, during which journalists allegedly made “provocative remarks” while asking questions.

Questioning a political leader at a press conference, however contentious the questions may be, is a fundamental part of a journalist’s professional duty. It cannot, in itself, constitute a crime against humanity.

The use of an International Crimes Tribunal to prosecute journalists for their professional conduct sets an extremely disturbing precedent for press freedom in Bangladesh. Journalists must be held accountable for genuine criminal acts where credible evidence exists, but they cannot be criminalised simply for asking

questions, reporting events or being perceived as politically sympathetic to one side or another.

“The CJA calls upon the Government of Bangladesh and the judicial authorities to ensure that journalism is not treated as a criminal activity ...”

The CJA has repeatedly expressed concern over the prolonged detention and prosecution of journalists in Bangladesh. Shyamal Dutta, Mozammel Haq Babu and Farzana Rupa have already spent a prolonged period in custody, despite serious questions over the evidence against them and the failure, according to reports, to file charge sheets substantiating the original allegations within the prescribed legal framework.

The CJA is also deeply concerned about the humanitarian circumstances surrounding their detention. Dutta has documented cardiac and severe sleep apnoea conditions requiring medical assessment and treatment. Babu underwent major surgery for prostate cancer in late 2023 and reportedly requires continuing medical care.

These circumstances make the continued incarceration of the three journalists all the more troubling.

The CJA calls upon the Government of Bangladesh and the judicial authorities to ensure that journalism is not treated as a criminal activity and that journalists are not punished for performing their professional responsibilities. The CJA urges the authorities to review the proceedings against Dutta, Babu and Rupa with the utmost urgency, ensure due process and credible evidentiary standards, and release them unless there is clear and demonstrable evidence of an independently established criminal offence.

The independence of the media is not a privilege granted by governments. It is an essential condition of a democratic society.

The CJA stands in solidarity with Shyamal Dutta, Mozammel Haq Babu, Farzana Rupa and all journalists in Bangladesh who seek only to perform their professional duties without fear of arrest, imprisonment or political retribution.

 [Updates from Dhaka:](#)

“A special tribunal in Dhaka ordered authorities to keep three journalists in custody pending trial: Mozammel Babu (editor-in-chief, Ekattor Television), Farzana Rupa (principal correspondent, Ekattor Television), and Shyamal Dutta (editor, Bhorer Kagoj). Next court hearing set for Oct. 25.”



UPDATES FROM CJABRANCHES



Uganda

Alice Drito writes from Uganda:

The Information and Communication Bill 2023 will be one of the high-priority items lined up on the parliamentary business agenda for 2026/2027.

The agenda aims at improving and strengthening existing legislations and policies, democracy and good governance and meeting aspirations of citizens in service delivery.

The idea is to enhance regulation of Uganda's booming digital media, especially the online content, managing cybersecurity, the Data Protection and Privacy Act and gender-based cyber harassment.

The programme was unveiled during the State of the Nation Address delivered by President Yoweri Museveni at the opening of parliament.

The Information and Communication Bill 2023 is strategic and significant because of its connection to Freedom of Expression and Media (FoE&M), the right to access public information and the protection and safety of Journalists and activists.

Legislators expect the ambitious programme to make reforms and repeal or amend sections of outdated media laws.

However, what is of critical concern to the media fraternity and other stakeholders is how the parliament will push for positive reforms and how the programme of legislation will address core matters of interest to the media on issues such as:

- The high cost of broadcasting licences;
- Censorship threatening professionalism;
- Laws criminalizing the sharing of digital messages;
- Critical reporting challenged by the classification of content as "prejudicial to national security, stability, or economic sabotage".





United
Kingdom

Raymond Whitaker, CJA-UK Chair, writes from the UK:

Executive members of CJA-UK have been closely involved in a multi-partner Commonwealth initiative proposed by the CJA, related to enhanced election observation missions in Commonwealth member states.

The project, aimed at practical implementation of the Commonwealth Media Principles in an African member state, is co-ordinated by the Secretariat, and is seen as a pilot for future elections. The outcome will become clear closer to the date of the 2026 CHOGM in Antigua and Barbuda.

CJA-UK has also been active in supporting fellow journalists under pressure around the Commonwealth. It joined the CJA internationally in calling for the release and dropping of unsubstantiated criminal charges against numerous prominent journalists in Bangladesh, including CJA vice-president Shyamal Dutta.

Dutta and many colleagues have been held behind bars since the student-led protests of 2024. Despite numerous health problems, he was refused bail and returned to detention after a recent court appearance.

CJA-UK has also provided support and co-operation with the Pakistan Rural Media Network and the Journalists Alliance Pakistan, both of which operate in vulnerable media environments outside the main cities.

In July the CJA teamed up with the Commonwealth Correspondents Network to publish the first of a series of collaborative video podcasts, *New Digital Media: Telling Untold Stories*. The podcast brought together four media personalities from Nigeria, Kenya, India and the UK, represented by CJA-UK Executive member William Horsley.

The Commonwealth

***The Commonwealth* Announced its 2026 Youth Award Winners, including the inaugural Patsy Robertson Prize**

“Breaking new ground this year, the Commonwealth Association, a Commonwealth Accredited Organisation, sponsored the inaugural Patsy Robertson Award for Outstanding Communications Skills. The new category was created to honour the legacy of the late Patsy Robertson, a former Director of Communications at the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Maria Maina from Kenya clinched the Patsy Robertson Award for her work in advancing gender equality through Social Justice Insights, a digital platform using research, advocacy and storytelling to educate young people on gender-based violence, femicide and women’s rights.

Each finalist in this category will also receive a complimentary membership in the Commonwealth Journalists Association, granting them access to a global network of journalists and a range of professional development opportunities.”

 [Read the full write up](#)

***The Committee to Protect Journalists* published a special report “How mass surveillance from online advertising puts journalists at risk”**

“I was very stunned to see some of my data in there,” said Dachwitz, who reports for netzpolitik.org and had permitted a weather app to track his location. “As a journalist who has covered these issues for a long time and even knowing an app had been logging my movements, it’s very spooky.”

 [Read the full report](#)



Africa

Maurice Oniang'o writes for the *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* “What next for East African media? Concern for public interest journalism under new owners”

In CJA's June Newsletter, we covered the unsettling acquisition of Nation Media Group, regarded as one of the important media outlets in Africa. Oniang'o updates us since the occurrence:

“On June 28, security forces drove up to the headquarters of Nation Media Group-Uganda and blocked the entrance. Uganda's largest independent daily newspaper, The Daily Monitor, and the broadcaster NTV Uganda were ordered to shut down.

Since then, the security forces' presence has stopped the newspaper from being printed, and regular radio and television programmes from being broadcast. The media outlets are continuing their work but have gone fully digital.”

 [Read the full article](#)

Find more on the topic at the links below:

 [Uganda: Authorities Must Immediately End the Harassment of Activists, Allow Media to Operate Freely](#)

 [Uganda's leading media outlets shut down by army chief](#)



***The International Federation of Journalists* reports “Zambia: Journalist arrested and charged under Cyber Crimes Act”**

“On 17 July, Zambian journalist Macpherson Mukuka was arrested by police in the capital city of Lusaka and has been detained ever since. He was accused of “publishing and secretly recording” an audio conversation that the authorities deemed to be in violation of the Cyber Crimes Act. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) condemns, in the strongest terms possible, Mukuka's arrest and calls for his immediate release.”

 [Read the full article](#)

The Thomson Reuters Foundation reports how “South Africa has a vibrant media sector, but our new report finds that journalists are operating in a challenging legal landscape”

“Our report shows that active legal abuses are intensified by regulatory gaps and weak enforcement of existing rights and protections. The challenge is not one single law or institution, but the combined burden of interconnected legal, economic and digital issues.”

 [Read the full report](#)



The *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* also writes “The fight to maintain public-interest journalism in Africa – ‘has to be based on quality’”

“How can African news organisations sustain trusted, public-interest journalism when audiences, attention and revenue are shifting to platforms, creators, and AI chatbots and summaries? This was the question at the heart of the Africa launch of the Digital News Report, which we hosted in partnership with our partners at Code for Africa.

Moderated by our Director of Leadership Development Federica Cherubini, the panel featured David Adeleke, founder and CEO of Communiqué; Queenter Mbori, Executive Director of the Association of Media Women in Kenya; and Adriaan Basson, Editor-in-chief of News24.”

Watch the debate here: [LIVE: Africa launch of the Digital News Report 2026](#)

 [Read the full article](#)



Asia

***The Diplomat* spotlights “Truth as Resistance: Journalism’s Role in Defending Indigenous Asia”**

“Across South and Southeast Asia, climate action is being subverted by a deliberate, calculated strategy: the weaponization of climate disinformation. Governments and corporations are increasingly deploying misleading narratives – ranging from greenwashing to outright denial – to marginalize Indigenous peoples, facilitate land dispossession, and obscure ecological harm.

This is a systematic campaign that threatens both human rights and the environmental integrity of the region. As these falsehoods harden into public consensus, the standard model of environmental reporting is no longer sufficient.”

 [Read the full article](#)

Read more from *The Diplomat*:

 [Transitional Justice or Political Retaliation? Bangladesh’s Journalists on Trial](#)

 [Principled Caution: Navigating AI in Asian Newsrooms](#)



***The Inter Press Service* reports “Pakistan’s Crackdown on Journalists Comes Under Heavy Fire”**

“Pakistan, one of few South Asian countries to oscillate between democratic governments and authoritarian regimes, is cracking down on journalists, including foreign correspondents covering the political situation in the world’s fifth most populous nation, with an estimated population of over 250 million people and ranking behind India, China, the United States, and Indonesia.



According to one report, Pakistan is technically under a nominal civilian coalition government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, but political analysts and experts describe the actual state as being under “constitutional militarism” or deep military dominance, with the military establishment holding sweeping authority.”

 [Read the full article](#)

Read more on journalism in Pakistan from CJA’s partner organisation Rural Media Network Pakistan

 [The Overlooked Struggle of Pakistan’s Rural and Regional Press](#)



Oceania

***The Conversation* covers Claude’s introduction to the media “ABC will trial using AI for journalism. What are the risks and benefits?”**

“Journalists and news producers have long had not only a vested interest in innovations that might improve their busy workflows, but also a broad curiosity about the cutting edge of tools and technologies.

Generative AI in chatbot form has only made headlines in the past three years. But journalists have saved time by using automated systems and “robo-writing” to convert data into simple news stories for over a decade. In one 2016 study, readers even rated computer-written articles as “more credible and higher in journalistic expertise”.

 [Read the full article](#)

***The Monthly* illuminates “Algorithm Nation”**

“Television remains a ubiquitous medium in the century’s second quarter. But TV’s influence is increasingly challenged by that of the internet. It has been Sky/News24’s partnerships with Microsoft and the digital advertising company Taboola (since July 2019), and YouTube



and Facebook (since August 2019), that have amplified the channel's reach exponentially. Its nightly hour-long blocks of alt-right commentary are frequently ranty, incoherent and difficult to watch without wincing out of embarrassment for the host. They routinely capture only about 3 per cent of the nation's audience share on a good night. But it's via YouTube and the Big Tech-owned media platforms – TikTok, X, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat – that News24 is reaching extraordinary numbers of Australian voters.”

 [Read the full article on One Nation's development](#)



Europe

***The Times of Malta* reports “We know who ordered my mother's murder' - Andrew Caruana Galizia”**

“Andrew Caruana Galizia has said his family remains convinced they know who ordered his mother's murder despite Yorgen Fenech's acquittal, arguing the jury's verdict cannot erase the "overwhelming" evidence presented during the trial.

“The country is now in the position of knowing exactly who was behind the contract on my mother's life only for a jury to fail to convict him,” Caruana Galizia said on Thursday.

Fenech was acquitted of complicity in the 2017 murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia following a 55-day trial by jury.”

 [Read the full article](#)

 [Read the CPJ's solidarity post on X](#)

 [Read more: Malta warned of corruption crisis after 'utter disbelief' over Daphne Caruana Galizia verdict](#)

***The BBC* reports “Veteran BBC Africa correspondent Mark Doyle dies aged 67”**

“British journalist Mark Doyle, best known for his reporting on conflicts in Africa in the 1990s and 2000s, has died aged 67 after a short illness.

After living in Africa, he joined the BBC in 1986. Doyle became East Africa correspondent in 1993 and made his mark covering the Rwandan genocide a year later.”

 [Read the full article](#)



AND FINALLY...

News from outside the Commonwealth

***France 24* reports “Prominent Mali journalist, influencer jailed for seven years for criticising junta”**

“Television and radio commentator Mohamed Youssouf Bathily – alias Ras Bath – was convicted by the court in Bamako of criminal conspiracy and discrediting the state, alongside Rokia Doumbia, a noted campaigner known online as “Rose, the cost of living”.

Both had been in custody for several years following the airing of a 2023 programme by the journalist dedicated to the economic difficulties facing ordinary Malians.”

 [Read the full article](#)

***L’Orient-Le Jour* writes “Moroccan journalist Ali Lmrabet has been released; the investigation continues”**

“Franco-Moroccan journalist Ali Lmrabet, arrested Sunday [July 12] evening upon his arrival in Morocco, was released Wednesday after being questioned as part of an ongoing investigation into online publications deemed defamatory, according to the prosecutor's office.”

 [Read the full article](#) (French)

Best wishes from the CJA newsletter team and we hope you had a restful summer!

If you’d like to contribute or make a suggestion to the CJA newsletter team, please email us;

 **Ben** is available at bcarson9@uwo.ca.

Newsletter Information Editor
Ben Carson

Editorial Review Team
Debbie Ransome
Rita Payne
Chris Cobb
Raymond Whitaker
William Horsley

Formatting
Janette Daramy