



IPI World Press Freedom Hero Pap Saine, editor and publisher of The Point in The Gambia

In a Nutshell, We Have Self-censorship

As one of the 60 "World Press Freedom Heroes", to be honored at the IPI World Congress in Vienna this year, he dedicates himself to the struggle for press freedom. Speaking to Valentin Ladstaetter and Laura Pannasch, he talks about the country's President Yahyah Jammeh and about the foundation of the first local independent newspaper "The Point", which he took over a year after the assassination of his colleague and childhood friend Deyda Hydara in December 2004. Nowadays, the newspaper is printed daily and stands for independent and free expression of opinion.

How do you feel about receiving this award?

I was surprised to receive this honor. But for thirty years of journalism, I thank IPI for support and pushing my morale and that of Gambian journalists. It is great for our work for press freedom to be honored by IPI.

What do you think about Yahyah Jammeh?

I think he is okay, I don't have any problem with him.

But he seems to harass the media.

Well, he established draconian laws. So he can fine journalists from 2000 Dollars up to 10 000 Dollars or more. People

should be very conscious about how they do their job. In a nutshell, we have self censorship, because we try to avoid going to prison.

Mr. Jammeh says that he can heal people from AIDS, Asthma or Diabetes. What do you think about this?

I can't make any comment on this...Because I know that he is a specialist for people who have problems with their extremities. When I was sick in 1992 and my right hand had a problem, he healed me. Because of his ancestors, who when you had a broken leg, or a broken arm, they knew how to do it.

By 1992 he was still in the military, right?

Yes, I went there as a journalist. I had a problem with my right wrist, it was very painful. I went there, he came, helped me, released it from me. That is very special, but on the other things, I cannot comment, because I don't know about it.

Have you ever thought about leaving the Gambia for another country such as the Senegal or maybe Liberia?

No, because I have my newspaper in Gambia and I don't want to move and I want to struggle on for the promotion of press freedom. What I need, from the

international administration is money for the paper, for sustaining the paper. Printing material is very expensive. But I don't know why I should seek asylum.

What do you think about Kenneth Best?

I know him very, very well. I respect him as a very professional journalist, but he is no longer in Gambia. He was deported to Liberia.

About six years ago, your friend Deyda Hydara was killed. What has changed for you since this assassination?

Well, he was my partner. He was my childhood friend. But unfortunately he lost his life to the struggle for a free press. Nevertheless, his legacy has continued. At first, the newspaper was not daily, but since I took over in 2005 it is daily and we also started a website. And now for the second time, we won an international prize. The first time in Germany the "Johann-Philipp-Palm-Preis" for media and press freedom in 2006, and the second time here at the IPI.

Who do you blame for Hydara's assassination?

I can't say.

What do you think can be done for the press freedom in Gambia in general?

Well, we need to struggle against bad laws. Abandon and reject them, you know. Because the law is very strict.

If you could make one wish to the president, what would it be?

Well, I would ask him to open his doors to us and secondly to abolish these laws.

About a year ago you went to jail. And your health was really in danger. Have you been able to regain your strength?

Well, I am feeling better now, I got support, thanks to Reuters, RSF, CPJ and other press institutions and the German Pen International, who got me medical and financial supply.

In many African countries, such as the Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia or Sierra Leone there was or is civil war at stake. What do you think can be done to end this?

This is a very difficult question. The UN should come back and reinforce most securities in these areas to maintain peace and stop the war. And there should be more trade within African countries.

Pap Saine is appealing to supporters of press freedom to assist his newspaper The Point with printing materials, especially newsprint to sustain the paper in the struggle to promote democracy, respect for human rights, and good governance.
