

# Grave press freedom violations in Africa

By Leigh Andrews

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Freedom of speech, long seen as a mainstay of the Western world, isn't necessarily a given elsewhere, especially when you criticise government policy and work in the media.

No-one said the life of a media worker would be easy, but it's an especially stressful day job in Africa. Not only do you need to multitask like a pro and dash from pillar to post, but reporting on reality means your life is often at stake - quite literally.



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In South Africa alone, the average reporter's day could include hiding behind police vans while live ammunition is fired, dodging rocks that are being hurled at your car and running for safety from drug addicts demanding money.

## The sad state of 'press freedom'

No surprise then that Reporters Without Borders' [World Press Freedom Index for 2017](#) showed Africa, much like the rest of the non-Western world, is experiencing a severe lack of media freedom. Norway's in top spot, with South Africa, ranked 31st, and North Korea coming in stone last.

“ World Press Freedom Index 2017. <https://t.co/mJRuyutbNO> pic.twitter.com/Tt6lSPsrLh— Nick Kumar (@BigNickKumar) [March 29, 2018](#) ”

Unfortunately, 2018 has been off to an equally bad start, and it's been an especially trying few weeks for press freedom on the continent. In the latest incident, a Mozambican political commentator and journalist was abducted and beaten after calling for the country's finance minister's resignation.

According to a statement published on [Reporters without Borders](#), that's the reason Mozambican journalist, lawyer, human rights activist and political commentator Ericino de Salema was forced into a car outside the headquarters of the National Union of Journalists in Maputo by three unidentified gunmen. He was later found unconscious on the Maputo Ring Road highway with serious 'torture-induced' injuries, including multiple fractures.



## Mozambique journalist abducted, assaulted

29 Mar 2018



[iFex](#), the global network defending freedom of expression, adds that Salema was a commentator for several media outlets and had received death threats the day before the abduction. [Club of Mozambique](#) adds that the attack took place just before 2pm, and that Salema was likely targeted because of his outspoken political views - sadly, this has become an all too familiar tale.

## Impunity, climate of fear

The Mass Media Supreme Council asserts that the fact the attack was carried out “in broad daylight is indicative of a climate of impunity,” with Human Right Watch also condemning the “climate of fear” in Mozambique.

Salema is now recovering but understandably shaken. As are media workers in general, as this comes on the back of news that SA advertising professional Leon Orsmond is believed to be missing as a result of criticism of Rwandan President Paul Kagame.



### SA adman feared abducted in Rwanda

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Reporters Without Borders condemns these as a grave press freedom violation and has called on the authorities to carry out thorough investigations in order to find those responsible.

Unfortunately, these were not isolated events. Hardly a week goes by without the heart-in-throat headlines that yet another African reporter has been detained for trying to report on the truth.



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With World Press Freedom Day just around the corner - set for 3 May in Accra, Ghana, Unesco has fittingly set the global theme as [‘Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and The Rule of Law’](#).

## Welcome World Press Freedom Day in Africa

Topics to be covered include issues of media and the transparency of the political process, the independence and media literacy of the judicial system, and the accountability of state institutions towards the public. The day will also shift from its traditional media focus to examine contemporary challenges of ensuring press freedom online.

This could not come at a better time. Let's do what we can to support those working to bring the truth to light!

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## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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