Journalists’ organizations ask World Bank president Kim to support human rights

Montreal, QC 15 April 2016 - Journalists and other advocates for freedom of expression around the world are calling on World Bank President Kim to embrace a human rights policy for the organization. The World Bank distributes billions of dollars every year with no obligation to international human rights law and does not conduct assessments to identify human rights impact.

Human rights will be a highly discussed topic at the Bank’s Spring Meetings from April 15-17, in Washington, DC, which will influence the final draft of the World Bank’s new social protection policy, expected this summer.

The World Bank lends billions of dollars to governments that condone media censorship and the arbitrary harassment, imprisonment, and murder of journalists and bloggers. The abusive conduct of many governments receiving this funding prevents journalists from speaking out against oppression and corruption for fear of violence or arbitrary fines.

“Ethiopian journalists cannot investigate corruption or they end up in prison and probably tortured. The World Bank ignores the problem, along with the fact that it cannot be assured that its funding is used well for the people that need it,” said Derek MacCuish, executive director of Social Justice Connection, which organized the letter effort. “The World Bank needs to recognize international human rights law to ensure that its funding does not support or implicitly condone this kind of violation of freedom of expression.”

China and Egypt, the two countries with the world’s highest journalist incarceration rates, had 72 journalists imprisoned in 2015 according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), one of the groups that signed the letter. Together these two countries received three billion dollars in World Bank funding last year.

"Journalists play a vital role in ensuring transparency and accountability for development initiatives and combatting corruption, so explicitly recognizing the importance of press freedom and the protection of fundamental human rights in World Bank policies would be an important step for an organization with its level of influence," said Courtney Radsch, CPJ's advocacy director.

For more on why press freedom matters for development see this CPJ resource, and for an overview of human rights violations in countries receiving World Bank funding, please refer to this document. The letter to Dr. Kim is available at the website of Social Justice Connection, here.

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