

## **IFAJ generates debate on freedom of the press**

*Dutch journalist and IFAJ executive committee member Hans Siemes has been leading a small working group to explore freedom of the press and how the organization can support journalists in countries where press freedom is restricted. He provides this update on discussions so far...*

**Freedom of the press is suddenly a big issue in the IFAJ - the organization has awaked a lion. Over the next few months the subject will be on the agenda of agricultural journalists and their national organizations in 30 member countries as they discuss the way IFAJ should handle it.**

During Green Week in Berlin in January the Executive Committee met and accepted a program to discuss and implement a ten-point plan for freedom of the press in the IFAJ. National delegates are now leading discussions on the plan within their organizations to generate feedback for a final discussion at the next General Assembly during the IFAJ congress in September.

The General Assembly has in the past underlined the importance of the IFAJ supporting freedom of the press because it is a very important issue in a journalistic organizations. The proposed ten-point plan gives the guidelines on how this can be done.

The key point is that the IFAJ will not accept as members national organizations from countries in which there is no freedom of the press. Existing memberships of countries who no longer have freedom of the press will be suspended.

Two well-recognised parameters have been identified to provide guidance on the status of freedom of the press in countries around the world - a watch list produced by the International Press Institute (IPI) and a non-freedom list maintained by Freedom House.

Of equal importance, the plan proposes that the IFAJ will support agricultural journalists who live in countries without freedom of the press and who want to work under 'free circumstances', particularly those who want to be involved with the IFAJ.

IFAJ will not re-invent the wheel but will work together with the IPI Institute which specialises in the matter of freedom of the press and knows how to operate best. The goal is identify tailor-made activities that will support their efforts.

IFAJ will become a member of the IPI. Every year the Presidium will make a report about the activities and about the situation of the freedom of the press, especially concerning member organizations and potential applicants.

That's the way the whole discussion started. A Russian organization of agricultural journalists made an application to become a member of the IFAJ. Russia was on the Watch List of the IPI and also the Freedom House put Russia on the list of non-freedom countries.

The General Assembly of the IFAJ decided in Japan last September to put the application 'on ice' until the freedom of the press issue was properly discussed. This discussion will be finalized in Austria when the IFAJ next meets in September.

Part of the discussion will be creating a statement that captures the IFAJ's position. A proposed text which member countries can adapt was put on the table in Berlin. The text is as follows:

*IFAJ stands for freedom of the press as defined by the International Press Institute. This means free access to the news, free transmission of news, free publication of newspapers, free expression of views. Only organizations which underline this freedom of the press can be a member of IFAJ. In countries without freedom of the press IFAJ will strongly support (organizations of) agricultural journalists, which want to work under the conditions of the freedom of the press. IFAJ will develop every year activities to help them.*