

Pacific Media Freedom Challenges

Pesi Fonua, Publisher/Editor, Matangi Tonga ONLINE

I think the biggest threat to Media Freedom in the Pacific right now is the aggressive and violent mind-set that some Pacific leaders and public figures hold toward media personnel and journalists.

In recent months we have heard of the deportation of Australian newspaper publishers from Fiji, the banning of New Zealand TV journalist from entering Fiji, and the beating up of a journalist in Vanuatu.

In other island states there are efforts by politicians and public figures to either influence the media or just shut them up. Or from their podiums they incite hatred toward publishers, journalists, and media personnel again with an aggressive and violent streak about it.

There are obviously a number of reasons for such backward behaviour but I think media ownership has a lot to do with it.

There is a confrontation between local leaders and foreign owned media, Fiji is one good example.

Some locally owned media start off as Watch Dogs, but due to a lack of capital, either become lap dogs or dead dogs.

When Pacific leaders embraced the concept of a Global Economy, the WTO, and Western Democracy it was accepted as a move toward establishing one happy world family.

Media is an expensive business to set up, and there is a need for skilled human resources. And when some of the big dailies in the islands are foreign owned and start singing their own kind of music, Pacific leaders call for them to either turn it down or turn it off completely.

So a big part of this kind of attitude - the idea that you are either with us or against us, - is based on a narrow political mind set, and has very little to do with journalism.

It is not a journalism problem, it is a political problem.

How are we going to counter this violent mind-set, I hope we will find an answer at the end of this Panel Discussion.