

Complaint Settled by the IMC

1. **Formal Complaint to the Independent Media Commission by National Security Council Coordination Group (NSCCG) made on behalf of UNIOSII against Awareness Times captioned 'Recommendation for suspension of the Awareness Times Newspaper'**

The National Security Council Coordination Group sent a letter to the Chairperson of the Independent Media Commission dated 4th September 2007 captioned **'Recommendation for suspension from publication of the Awareness Times Newspaper'**. The letter stated that it viewed with dismay the incessant publications by the Awareness Times Newspaper of articles which hinged on the personality and credibility of key international partners who were helping the electoral process and development strides in a post conflict country.

It further stated that the publications had led in part to a UN Technical Electoral Staff being accosted in Kailahun which may also be replicated in other parts of the country with the possibility of inciting violence. It maintained that despite admonishments by the IMC to all media outlets to refrain from negative reporting, the Awareness Times Newspaper continued to castigate the personalities of key development partners on unsubstantiated grounds. It was in that regard the letter continued, that in order to maintain good relationship with the international community the suspension of Awareness Times from publication for one month was being proposed.

Rather than hastily act on the directive of the NSCCG, the IMC decided to treat the matter as a complaint.

The Commission conducted several hearings on the matter at which Mr. Vandi Minah, Legal Adviser of UNIOSIL represented UNIOSIL. Awareness Times Newspaper was represented by Dr. Sylvia Blyden.

During the proceedings and cross examinations, the Complaints Committee patiently listened to arguments from both sides and read documents presented by them.

At the end of the deliberations, the IMC's decisions were as follows:-

- (a) Awareness Times should forthwith cease all publications on the subject of the complaint i.e. the perceived manipulation of the 2007 elections and regime change by UNIOSIL and the International community.
- (b) Awareness Times should cease all publications aimed at smearing the personality and integrity of H.E. Victor Angelo and other members of the international community.
- (c) The counsel for UNIOSIL Mr. Vandi Minah should convey to the organization Dr. Sylvia Blyden's verbal complaint to the IMC about attacks on her character and integrity by UN media including UN Radio and UN Review Media Reports posted on the internet.
- (d) To facilitate the process of reconciliation between Awareness Times and UNIOSIL the UN Media should cease all broadcast and publications deemed to smear the integrity and personality of Dr. Sylvia Blyden.
- (e) That Mr. Vandi Minah and Dr. Sylvia Blyden having agreed on reconciliation and to develop a joint statement to the effect, the IMC stood ready to facilitate the process even if it meant requesting the Commissioners to cut short their Christmas vacation to attend to the issue before the departure of H.E. Victor Angelo.

Even though it is now six weeks (February 2008) - since the two parties agreed to submit a joint statement on reconciliation to the Commission, and despite the fact that several reminders had been sent, no joint statement has been received.

The IMC is however of the view that since the 2007 Elections were over and the matter was highly political with both sides full of accusations and counter-accusations, it was best for both parties to reconcile and put the whole episode behind them. This viewpoint was accepted by Dr. Sylvia Blyden and the former Legal Adviser of UNIOSIL, Mr. Vandi Minah. The matter has therefore been laid to rest.