

Ombudsmen and Press Councils

Does media self-regulation make any sense?

Can it avoid the daunting challenges?

And more to the point:

Is it a good investment in support of press freedom?

First: What are major THREATS to the cause of press freedom?

- ❑ Government interference
- ❑ Litigation and other private repressive action
- ❑ Corporate conglomeration, and other economic pressures

Yes: these are all issues self-regulatory bodies can and should address

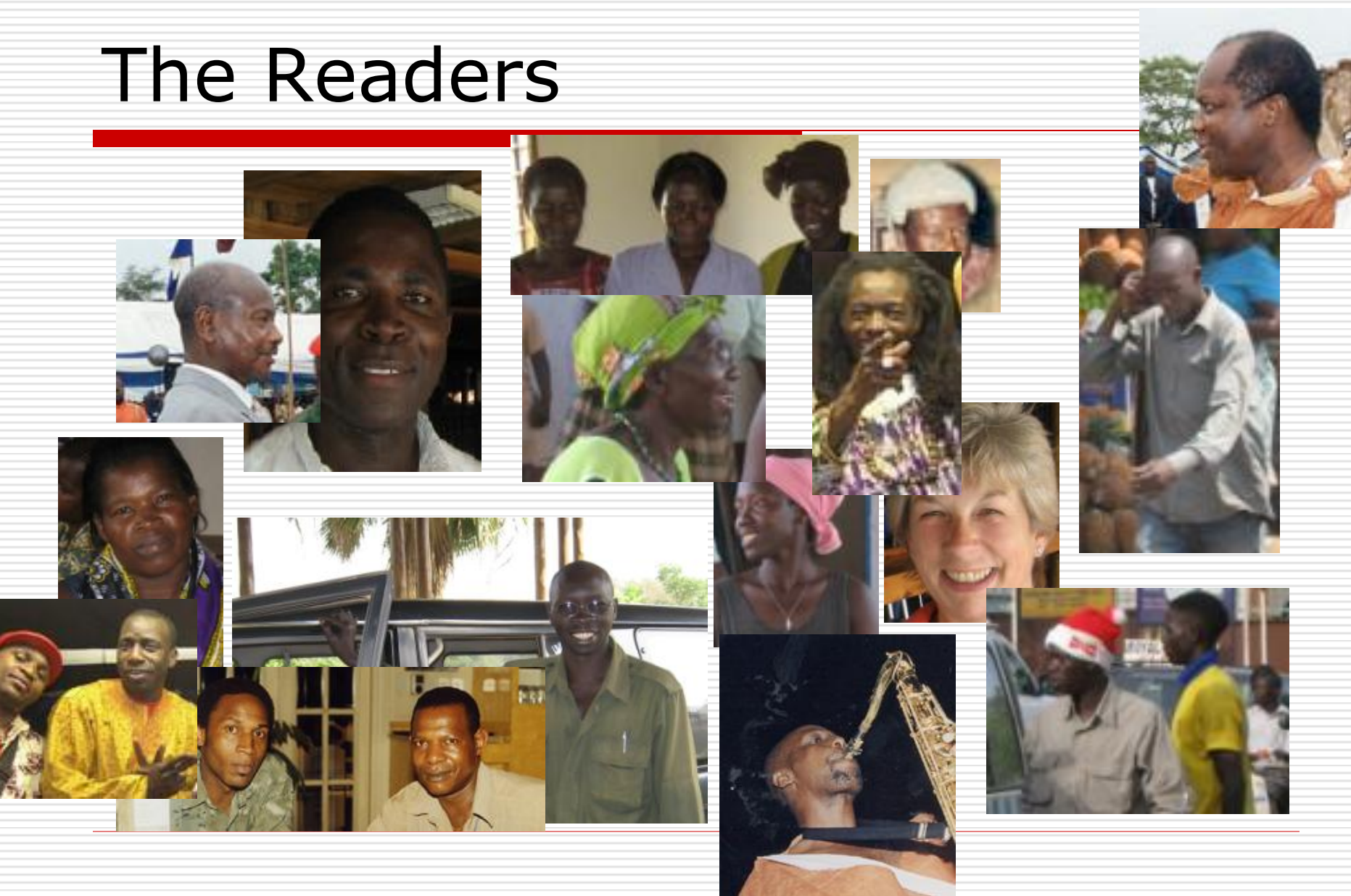
- ❑ But there's another, less commonly mentioned, threat to press freedom
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The threat from within

- Too often – and with far greater consequence than they realize – journalists fail at a critically important task:

Listening to

The Readers



□ “An independent press council helps to make sure that [press freedom] is respected and at the same time it is not abused by the media institutions.

It's very easy to go overboard with the freedom and neglect the other responsibility of the council, which is to defend the public interests against abuses by the press.”

-- *Endy Bayuni, chief editor, the Jakarta Post*

Brief overview and history

- Two types: Ombudsmen and Press Councils
 - Two approaches -- in developed and in developing countries
 - And a few numbers:
 - 1809
 - 1916
 - 1920s
 - 40
 - 48
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Different cultural contexts for self-regulatory bodies

- In Western, developed countries:
 - Primarily complaints against media
 - Often, suspicion FROM the media
 - In countries with developing institutions:
 - Many more complaints against governments
 - Stronger educational/training role
 - Institutional advocacy
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Two case studies

- **Bosnia-Herzegovina:** A test of whether perseverance really CAN further
 - **Brazil:** An ombudsman with a very sharp tongue
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Barriers to success of self-regulation... and to the cause of press freedom

- Governments
 - Funding issues
 - The aggressive public
 - Lack of media cooperation, and other internal problems
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Keys to success

- ❑ Created by journalists
 - ❑ Supported by the industry
 - ❑ Codes of standards – written down, and followed
 - ❑ Adequate funding, with no strings attached
 - ❑ Protection against defamation lawsuits
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So? ARE they a good investment?

- I will use this as a transition to my colleagues. But not to duck the question entirely, I would reframe it this way:
 - ***Is a free and open society a good investment?***
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