

IFEX Dispatches from 2024

FORGING COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

ifex

03 A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

IT TAKES A NETWORK!

04 A look back before the next leap

FREEDOM ROOTED IN CONNECTION | NETWORK BUILDING

07 Walking the talk: Our commitments to collaboration
 07 Come together! 2024 IFEX Convening & General Meeting
 09 Regional Networking
 11 Enhanced resilience and vision

13 SPOTLIGHT: PALESTINE

AN OVERARCHING NARRATIVE | CIVIC SPACE

15 The conditions for trust
 17 Connecting national needs to international mechanisms
 18 Protecting civic space in an elections-filled year
 19 Communities of practice

20 SPOTLIGHT: NIGERIA

A HOLISTIC APPROACH | SAFETY AND JUSTICE

22 A radical reset for journalist safety
 24 Protection and accountability
 26 Taking on climate (in)justice

28 SPOTLIGHT: BELARUS

COUNTERING INEQUITIES | ACCESS TO INFORMATION

30 Advancing the vision of those on the ground
 32 Action to (re)shape digital norms and standards
 34 Champions of access to and integrity of information

35 LOOKING AHEAD | A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

March 2025

Dear friends,

At a time when the terms ‘record-breaking’ and ‘unprecedented’ too often describe negative developments in our world, it’s hard to find opportunities to reflect and process.

Looking back on 2024, what stands out for me is how the IFEX network rose to meet each challenge. We countered extraordinary efforts to undermine the free expression rights we promote and defend, as well as attacks directed at our own abilities to do this work. In a context where polarisation and divisiveness are on the ascent, we showed each other solidarity, support, compassion, and understanding.

This was evident at our IFEX 2024 Convening in April. Our ability to ‘[come together](#)’ and create something greater than the sum of our parts was proven once again. The knowledge, experience, and commitment we bring to the table – transforming anger into positive collaborative action – never ceases to amaze and inspire me.

In 2024 we took action against injustice, celebrated our successes together, owned our missteps, and lifted each other up when needed.

We built on our commitment to innovating change through stimulating exchanges, collaborations, and new alliances. A standout was our work to solidify a set of [Collaboration Principles](#) for the network that underpin what makes IFEX not only unique, but indispensable.

I’d like to acknowledge here the efforts of all IFEX members, partners, allies, and staff for driving positive change with such courage, integrity, and passion, and extend our heartfelt thanks to our donors who help resource and advance this essential work.

As we look ahead to the challenges and opportunities that 2025 brings, I hope that you will feel strengthened by a shared vision of the possibility of a more just and inclusive world, where all lives are enriched by the sharing of ideas and information, and where people express themselves and participate in their communities freely, actively, and without fear.

In solidarity,

Rachael



RACHAEL KAY
IFEX Executive Director

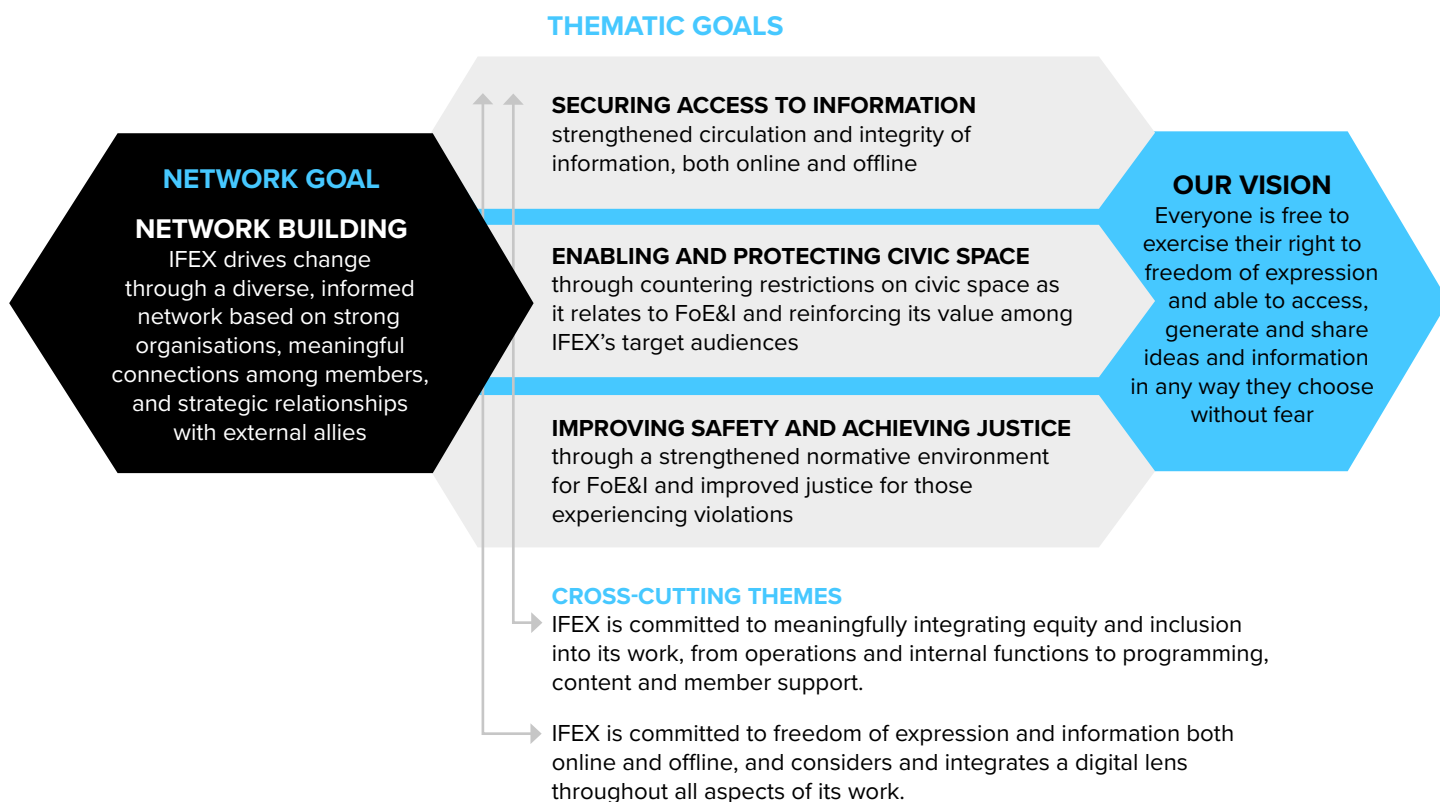
It takes a network!

We are living in a uniquely challenging and tumultuous context for freedom of expression and information (FoE&I). 2024 marked the final year of IFEX’s 2020-2024 Strategic Plan – a period shaped by an increasingly complex and uncertain environment. With a surge in authoritarian governments, political violence, and war crimes – combined with a global pandemic, technology-enabled abuses of power, and the existential

threat of climate breakdown as the backdrop – it isn’t surprising that there is a prevailing sense of instability and anxiety about the future.

Despite these challenges, our network’s unwavering commitment to FoE&I, coupled with our collaborative approaches to achieving shared goals, have ensured IFEX remains an effective force for change.

IFEX 2020-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN



A LOOK BACK BEFORE THE NEXT LEAP

As we approach the end of a strategic cycle, it is essential to reflect on the work completed. The evaluation of IFEX’s 2020-2024 Strategic Plan was an important undertaking in 2024.

Between February and August, two independent consultants conducted a comprehensive evaluation of our impact, progress, and lessons learned along the way. The results underscored that our unique advantage truly lies in the network’s values and ways of working. The “IFEX style” emerged as a distinctive strength that underpins the benefits members and others gain from engaging with the network.

It also became clear through this process that IFEX’s role in fostering solidarity among members is a vital contribution, not a mere side effect, empowering members by reassuring them they are not alone.

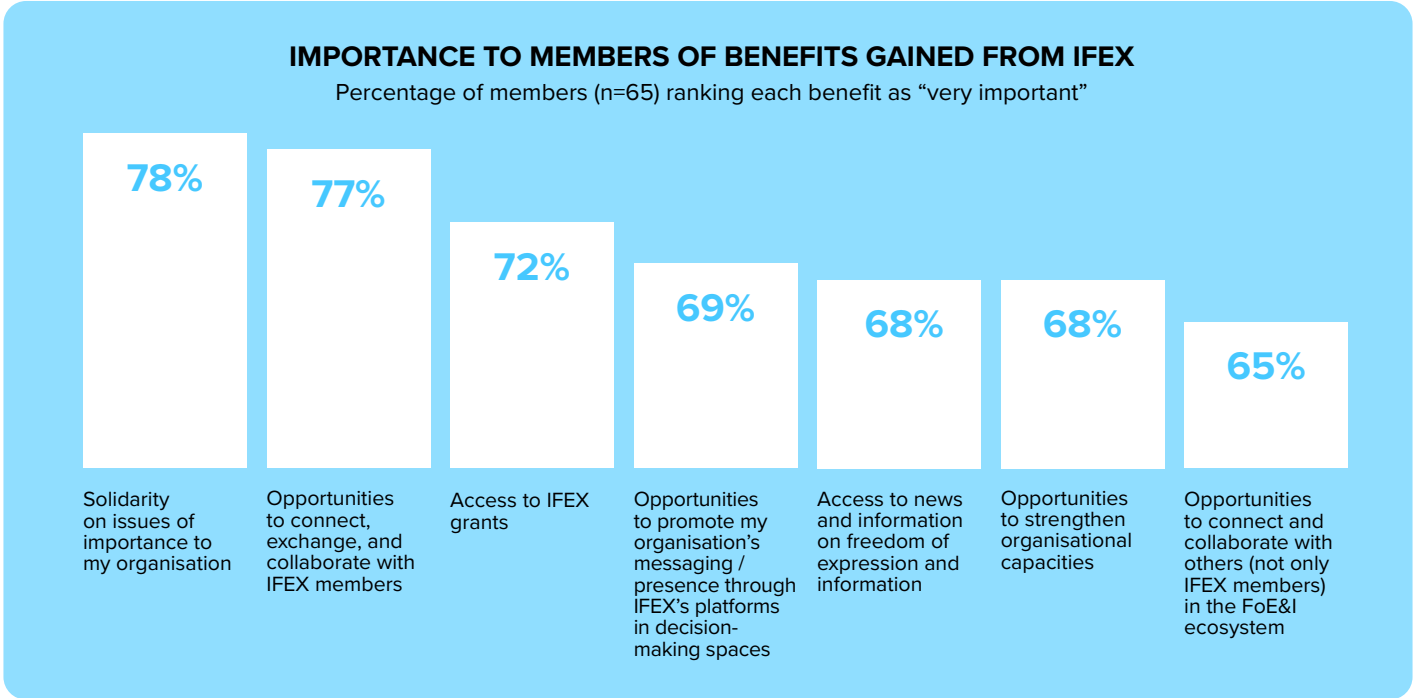
The evaluation showed that IFEX has made significant progress in achieving its strategic objectives, and confirmed a strong alignment between IFEX’s Strategic Plan and the needs and priorities of its members – 93% of whom reported that IFEX’s work is consistent with their goals.

“A critical conclusion of this evaluation is that the solidarity, connection, and empowerment that IFEX fosters are the bedrock of everything it achieves.”

IFEX Independent Evaluation 2020–2024 Strategic Plan

Our collaborative approach has helped build trust and foster stronger cooperation. Members valued the Secretariat’s commitment to equity, flexibility, and empathy, emphasizing the respect staff show for their expertise and experience. They appreciated the efforts to address issues related to digital FoE&I, with many calling for a greater focus on emerging technologies, such as AI, in the years ahead.

The report’s thirteen key findings and four recommendations offered a window into how IFEX is perceived by members, allies, and donors. The comprehensive approach we took to the process reinforced our commitment to involving members and partners in shaping future work, to forge collective resistance and ensure coherent, aligned, and effective action.





FREEDOM ROOTED IN CONNECTION

88% of members agreed that the capacity of the network had been strengthened over the past five years.

Freedom can only be experienced alongside others; it rests on our intrinsic need for connection and community. In a world that is becoming increasingly fragmented, working with diverse others is a necessary condition to tackle our most pressing challenges.

In 2024 IFEX members and allies continued to creatively find ways to virtually connect and engage, reinforcing our model for meaningful interaction that is based on trust, collaboration, and respect. The IFEX General Meeting and Convening reunited the network and its allies in person, creating a precious opportunity to spend time together and collectively embody the network's core values.

IFEX members exchanging ideas on FoE&I issues during the 2024 convening in Berlin.



PHOTO BY IFEX

Walking the talk: Our commitments to collaboration

Just and sustainable social change involves many and diverse stakeholders, as together we become greater than the sum of our parts. IFEX's 2023 [Collaboration Code Report](#) showed that collaboration is both increasingly necessary and increasingly difficult in a fragmenting global order.

To continue leading by example and exploring systemic, collaborative, and creative approaches to meet the challenges of our time, in 2024 we developed and shared a set of action-oriented tools – based on the Report's findings – that leverage best practices and enable a collaborative culture. They are:

- ▶ **The Collaboration Principles**: a practical framework, centred on IFEX's mission and values, to guide members in fostering genuine, effective collaboration and overcoming challenges through reflection, trust, and open experimentation.
- ▶ **The Collaboration Checklists for Civil Society Organisations**: a tool designed to help with internal assessment and action planning on how to work together.

This work on collaboration is also shining a light on practices that perpetuate power imbalances between civil society organisations (CSOs), a necessary step as we advance in our commitments to decolonial practices and social justice.

Come Together! IFEX 2024 Convening & General and Annual Meeting

More than 100 member organisations from around the world gathered in Berlin in April 2024 as IFEX held its first face-to-face network meeting since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [Convening](#) provided important opportunities to explore pressing issues together, fuel our collective imaginations, and create meaningful opportunities for exchange between IFEX members and allies.

IFEX designed the event to foster and deepen personal connections across the network through relationship-oriented interactions. Departing from a ‘sit and listen’ type of conference, the agenda prioritised ‘corridor conversations’ – informal exchanges hosted by members. These spaces allowed participants to propose topics and invite others to share their ideas, experiences, successes, and struggles. Member-driven conversations covered topics such as surveillance of digital activists, international support for a democratic and inclusive society in Myanmar, countering toxic polarizing narratives, and strategies for when advocacy fails.

The Convening was also an opportunity to strengthen collaboration with allies. We partnered with the Business and Human Rights Resource Center to host a session on how to engage with the corporate sector to move the needle on FoE&I rights. We also collaborated with Global Partners Digital in the design and facilitation of two sessions focused on digital governance.

Our commitment to the essential messiness of human connection, the unpredictability of relationships, and the humility of shared learning shaped a convening where activities like dance warmups, drumming, and meditation were part of the agenda. To experiment with new tools to strengthen relationships, we also developed an app to support connections and spark exchanges.



PHOTO BY IFEX

Participants chatting during the 2024 convening in Berlin.

IN THE WORDS OF PARTICIPANTS

What did you learn at the Convening?

“Interesting and surprising information on restricted freedom of expression in some EU countries.”

“Experiences from the Global Majority can actually help some countries with a long democratic history to overcome their current crisis in freedom of expression.”

What will you take away with you?

“New knowledge on advocacy, engaging with governance processes.”

“Specific and concrete ideas for future action and collaborative projects as well as many new precious contacts and friendships.”

REGIONAL NETWORKING

While in Berlin for IFEX's GM and Convening, the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) network, the IFEX Latin America & Caribbean Alliance (IFEX-ALC), and IFEX members working in the Middle East and North Africa met with their regional colleagues to discuss priorities, capacities, and potential opportunities for working together moving forward. On the agendas: How to bolster members' advocacy efforts, best practices for advancing journalists' safety, addressing funding crises, censorship, and the harm caused by regional conflicts and violence.

Members of IFEX-ALC during the 2024 convening in Berlin.

IFEX-ALC | Celebrating 15 years

For IFEX-ALC, the gathering was a chance to celebrate its 15th anniversary and acknowledge its many achievements. It was also an opportunity to collectively re-examine what their priorities should be in the face of rising authoritarianism, polarisation, and diminishing resources for CSOs in the region. Building on efforts initiated during their meeting in Mexico City in 2023, they continued work on a strategic Route Map for IFEX-ALC under the umbrella of IFEX's Strategic Plan. The Route Map provides a streamlined structure for guiding IFEX-ALC members' shared priorities and emphasises the need to tap into member's knowledge and experiences to strengthen the network with their leadership.



PHOTO BY IFEX

AFEX | Mentorship and collaboration for change

IFEX members in Africa discussed strategic initiatives and explored ways to bring more collaborative approaches to advocacy. One opportunity identified was to increase the network’s regional impact by producing unified reports for regional and international bodies. Members with extensive experience of regional mechanisms expressed their willingness to share best practices and mentor others, creating a valuable learning opportunity within the network. Two non-AFEX members – Namibia Media Trust and Paradigm Initiative – also joined the meeting, offering fresh perspectives and fostering cross-sector partnerships. A new Steering Committee was also elected, forging a refreshed leadership team from the AFEX membership.



PHOTO BY IFEX/IFEX

Participants during a group activity at the 2024 convening in Berlin

MENA | Solidarity and support

The MENA regional meeting provided a space for members to discuss some of the unique hurdles they face, the many facets of oppression in the region, and the grave situation in Palestine. Topics were sourced from members ahead of the meeting,

helping ensure a focus on the most pressing issues: building alliances and enhancing their advocacy efforts, documenting violations against journalists, and tackling challenges to accessing international funding and registering in foreign countries.

Collaboration in Action | Joint funding proposals

New forms of collaboration are helping us unlock access to funding streams that would otherwise be unavailable to members.

Last year IFEX produced concept notes and proposals in partnership with members on several occasions, including joint applications for funding – something we had done little of before.

When pursuing these opportunities, we focus on the synergies and complementarities that arise

from working together. This involves leveraging an understanding of the unique knowledge and experiences that each member brings to the table, aligning our goals, and establishing an approach that enables mutual trust and accountability.

Recognising that this and other forms of collaboration are becoming increasingly important to resource CSOs in upcoming years, IFEX is strategically experimenting with these new forms of partnership.

ENHANCED RESILIENCE AND VISION

The acute and devastating shifts within key funding bodies have resulted in loss of critical resources for CSOs working on FoE&I. IFEX continues to support the institutional development of members through tailored and flexible assistance, exploring new ways to respond to the very difficult funding ecosystem that members – and the network – are facing.

IFEX offers a system of support to strengthen members' organisational capacities and their ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Our long-term relationships with members allow for transparent conversations as well as flexibility and responsiveness, which have proven crucial in a volatile and uncertain environment.

Unbundling strengths to explore new opportunities | Bolivia

The Asociación Nacional de la Prensa (ANP) has been working on the defense and promotion of FoE&I in Bolivia for decades. As attacks against the press have increased, ANP's work has become even more critical.

In 2024 IFEX supported ANP to identify new areas of work to expand into and opportunities to diversify their funding sources, to contribute to their financial sustainability. The grant enabled ANP to combine training opportunities for their team with coaching from a fundraising expert. They were able to

“We thank IFEX for supporting an institutional transition process that will help improve the strengths of the ANP to continue working for the defense of human rights and press freedom in Bolivia.”

Asociación Nacional de la Prensa (ANP)

articulate their unique strengths, develop a donor map, and prepare new projects that transferred their strengths and knowledge to new funding streams.

One outcome of this process was a decision to include a more active gender perspective in their work, including through the provision of services such as legal support, psychological support, and special assistance to women journalists. They would be able to build on their prior experience training indigenous women from rural populations to strengthen their news reporting and radio-broadcasting practices.

A vision informed by equity and inclusion | MENA

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) provides support and protection to human rights defenders in the MENA region, with an emphasis on Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries, while enabling CSO connections with the international community. In 2024 IFEX supported a GCHR project to assess their equity and inclusion practices and incorporate that lens into its strategic plan and theory of change.

IFEX connected GCHR with a Lebanon-based consultant who conducted an audit of their practices that revealed a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. The audit also highlighted areas for improvement such as clearer policies, better communication channels, and more engagement with diverse groups in politically restricted regions.

Following the audit, a staff and board retreat in Lebanon was planned to incorporate these learnings into GCHR's Strategic Plan. However, safety risks arising from Israeli attacks on Lebanon led to postponing the retreat several times. GCHR was finally able to meet in May, providing an opportunity to come together, support one another, and express solidarity with staff and board members living in Lebanon.

“We appreciate the flexibility of IFEX to extend the grant’s timeline and scope, especially given the war impacting Lebanon and our staff who are based there”

Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)

Enhancing financial sustainability | Liberia

Challenges regarding freedom of expression and peaceful assembly still impact full and free participation in Liberia’s civic space. The Center for Media Studies & Peace Building (CEMESP) works to foster democratic accountability and promote an open civic space through the promotion of free media, but there are many obstacles to resourcing the work.

In 2024, IFEX provided CEMESP with funds to enhance its financial sustainability. CEMESP engaged with a fundraising expert who supported the team in securing a European Union grant for the Liberia Media Empowerment project. This initiative will assure its ability to engage with diverse stakeholders and continue mobilising resources to strengthen the work of media professionals as well as of peacebuilding and human rights organisations.

A young man takes part in a protest over brutality against journalists in the centre of Monrovia in 2020.



PHOTO BY CARIELLE DOE

Spotlight: Palestine

In 2024 the Israeli bombardment of Gaza continued taking its devastating toll and the Israeli government's [genocidal intent](#) became increasingly [clear](#). Confrontations with Israel escalated across the region. In the face of the unfolding horrors, IFEX provided Palestinian and Lebanese IFEX members with support and solidarity.

Journalists are playing a pivotal role in supporting access to information, documenting human rights abuses and war crimes, all while facing life-threatening risks, targeted attacks, and systemic violations of their own rights. IFEX supported a member to enact an Emergency Journalists Fund that provides legal aid and rights awareness training to Palestinian journalists based in Israel, enabling a more secure environment for their reporting.

On 6 March, we partnered with IFEX-member 7amleh and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), an ally network, to host a [virtual convening](#) on the state of journalism in Gaza. It featured a panel made up entirely of Palestinian women journalists, and the conversation was moderated by Jalal Abukhater from 7amleh.

PHOTO BY IFEX



Central image of the IFEX campaign for the 2024 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.

In June, IFEX published a [statement](#) calling for justice for violations of human rights committed by Israel and for its allies to respect and uphold international law, including orders by the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice. In line with IFEX's approach, Palestinian members were involved in planning the statement from the outset and at each subsequent stage.

Despite urgent calls from international bodies, States were failing to take action. IFEX launched several targeted advocacy efforts. In the same month that we issued the statement, we responded to a call for inputs from the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression for her report on "Global threats to freedom of expression arising from the conflict in Gaza". Our submission highlighted how Israel's attempts to control the narrative on Gaza were being bolstered by the repression of solidarity protests in pro-democratic states and amplified by social media platforms' censorship.

"Palestinian journalists face high risks of death, harm to their families, disrupted communications, supply shortages and famine, which means that the world hears less and less of the voices of people facing this genocide, occupation, and conflict."

7amleh

On 30 October, to support the launch of the final report presented to the UN General Assembly, IFEX joined forces with 7amleh and APC once again to co-host a second [virtual convening](#) to discuss with the Special Rapporteur the main findings and recommendations of her report.

We published a special brief to [chronicle](#) advocacy and solidarity actions taken by IFEX members to confront Israel's impunity. It underscored the urgent need for accountability and highlighted the relentless efforts of members in demanding justice.



PHOTO BY RICARDO CEPPI

AN OVERARCHING NARRATIVE

94% of members agreed that the network has successfully contributed to enabling civil society and protecting civic space as it relates to FoE&I

An increasing concentration of economic power is fueling authoritarianism and inequitable agenda-setting. In a year when more than half of the world's population participated in local and/or international elections, we saw a troubling rise in laws that criminalise CSOs, civic engagement, and the right to protest. These seek to ban advocacy and undermine the ability of CSOs to exist and operate.

The role of networks like IFEX has become even more crucial, as organisations operating in isolation face the greatest risk of unchecked harassment and closure.

The sheer volume of information can be overwhelming, along with the challenges for citizens trying to distinguish what is real, and determine who to trust. And the rapid evolution of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) means that the capacity to generate disinformation is growing exponentially.

CSOs enable the conditions for diverse individuals to participate in public life and encourage people to engage in civic activities. They also help build trust by holding those in power accountable.

Dialogue and collaboration | Nepal

Nepal has been experiencing an alarming obstruction of civic space by the government in recent years. Peaceful protests have been met with arbitrary arrests and force, authorities have limited the use of public spaces to gather or express dissent, and critics and human rights defenders have been targeted. Freedoms in the digital realm have been suppressed through increased surveillance and a TikTok ban. IFEX member Freedom Forum recorded 34 incidents affecting journalists between November 2023 and July 2024, most of them against journalists associated with online media networks.

PHOTO BY SANJIT PARIYAR



A protest against unscrupulous lenders drew thousands of marchers from various districts of Nepal to the capital on 29 February 2024.



PHOTO BY AFP

A woman chants slogans as pro-democracy protesters march in Khartoum, Sudan, in 2022.

In the face of the government’s authoritarian inclinations and the suppression of fundamental freedoms, Freedom Forum organised two dialogues on digital civic spaces with support from an IFEX grant. These brought together journalists, government officials, advocates, and experts on digital civic space to review several bills proposed by the government, including the Information Technology and Cybersecurity Bill, Mass Communications Bill, Media Council Bill, National Mass Media Bill, and Social Media Operation Bill. A key success of this project was the amendment to the Media Council Bill, which helped develop civic space legislation through a highly collaborative process.

Part of the funds were used to establish FoE&I networks in seven provinces, in partnership with the National Human Rights Commission Nepal (NHRCN). These provincial networks bring together diverse voices, including Nepal’s ethnic minorities, and play a key role in driving awareness campaigns that promote civic space and FoE&I in the provinces. They also help identify threats and investigate cases on the ground.

Strategic and inclusive engagement | South Sudan

Freedoms of assembly, association, and expression are under severe threat in South Sudan. Journalists work in a climate of fear and intimidation, and censorship is ever-present. This repression not only stifles political opposition but also erodes the fundamental rights that are the foundation of democratic societies. The 2024 elections were postponed, raising concerns about the authorities’ commitment to a democratic transition.

“Our collaboration with NHRCN in the formation of a multi-stakeholders’ network is a successful example of a collaborative approach in promoting freedom of expression in Nepal. These networks will gradually prepare strategies to address threats on press freedom, freedom of expression and investigate the cases in the field.”

Freedom Forum

The Association for Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISS) works to support an environment where media and journalists can operate freely. Through an IFEX grant, AMDISS organised a Media Stakeholders Forum in November 2023 that brought together senior government officials and CSOs to discuss issues related to civic space and media freedom. In 2024, AMDISS followed up on this by successfully engaging with individuals in strategic leadership positions, using the 2023 forum outcomes to draft a set of recommendations on issues affecting the safety of journalists, censorship, and threats to civic space. AMDISS then held a number of advocacy meetings with government officials to share their concerns.

To foster a broader and more accessible understanding of the role of civic space, AMDISS also produced a radio jingle that was air-played in five of South Sudan's ten states. It was translated into local languages to ensure it reached all citizens.



A pensionist takes part in a weekly protest against Javier Milei's economic policies in Buenos Aires in 2024.

Advocacy and solidarity | Argentina

Argentina's civic space has been rapidly deteriorating since the election of President Javier Milei. It is becoming increasingly difficult to participate, express opinions, or influence public debates without facing [retaliation](#). Government actions are not only stifling dissent, they are endangering journalists and those who dare to speak out.

In coordination with regional networks Alianza Regional por la Libre Expresión e Información and Red Voces del Sur, IFEX-ALC prepared a [joint statement](#) expressing concerns about the closure of civic space in the country. This statement helped strengthen the collective narrative around shrinking civic space as well as solidarity and coordination among regional networks.

CONNECTING NATIONAL NEEDS TO INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS

Through its participation in selected coalitions, networks, and working groups, IFEX bridges the gap between members and intergovernmental bodies. Our approach strengthens international solidarity by connecting members with relevant stakeholders and platforming voices that are often excluded from decision-making spaces. In 2024, some examples of these efforts included:

Raising concerns within the Community of Democracies Working Group on Enabling & Protecting Civic Society (CoDWG). This work was sparked by a legal initiative that could restrict the rights of CSOs in Peru. IFEX played a lead role in developing a call to action that provided legal and contextual analysis and clear recommendations for States. The call was shared with the diplomatic counterparts of CoDWG member states and intergovernmental partners for diplomatic action.

Responding to a call for inputs from the UN

Independent Expert on international solidarity. In our [submission](#), we highlighted how IFEX's networked approach to expressing support for, and solidarity with, affected member organisations has been critical in pushing back against repressive efforts. Members' experiences were shared to illustrate how repressive legislation, alongside barriers to participation in high-level spaces at the UN, is targeting and obstructing the work of CSOs. Our response included specific recommendations for how States and other relevant stakeholders can help promote and strengthen the work of CSOs and civic space.

Supporting Global Affairs Canada in reviewing the UN thematic [resolution](#) on freedom of opinion and expression. This included facilitating the engagement of other Canada-based IFEX members such as OpenMedia to provide input to the resolution, which is the UN's primary initiative focused specifically on developing robust standards on the right to freedom of expression.

Promoting greater transparency in the election of judges to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. IFEX-ALC hosted a hybrid event, co-organised with allies Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF), and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, that provided an opportunity for CSOs to interact with candidates in a process that otherwise lacks mechanisms for their participation.

PROTECTING CIVIC SPACE IN AN ELECTIONS-FILLED YEAR

Some 70 countries that are home to half the world's population were set to hold elections in 2024. IFEX launched [Protect Civic Space](#) campaigns aligned with the priorities of members in [Tunisia](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Ghana](#), [Venezuela](#), and [Romania](#), ahead of those countries' elections.

Collaborating with IFEX members on these campaigns throughout the year helped us refine our approach and integrate learnings. In some cases

members led the strategic design and deployment of the campaign, with IFEX serving as a connector to support collaboration between them. Members also provided critical feedback on language and image selection to ensure they resonated with the local context and accurately represented minority communities who are most vulnerable when civic space is restricted.

Collaboration in Action | Communications to foster understanding and engagement

IFEX's [briefs](#) bring member approaches and work to a wider audience, and build awareness of common issues within and across regions. While exploring the intersections between FoE&I and other critical issues, they spark collaboration between members and allies, and ensure we continue to monitor key developments over time. Highlights include:

Looking Ahead: A series that highlighted issues to watch for in the coming year included: [Democratic deficits make for a bumpy road to Senegal's elections](#), [Argentina at a crossroads, media and women's rights at risk](#), [Censorship, AI, disinformation, and repression undermining elections](#), [A wartime election and a serious stress test](#), and [The fight against Israel's impunity gains legal momentum](#).

A focus on civic space briefs: Pieces included the [repression of European voices](#) and crackdowns on Palestinian solidarity protests across the [US](#); threats to civic space in [Romania](#), [Venezuela](#) and the [MENA](#) region ahead of their elections; and a special issue looking at [2024 elections](#) across the African continent.

Sri Lanka's civic space on the line

With over 17 million people [eligible](#) to cast votes in the election amidst a severe economic downturn, 2024 was a critical year for Sri Lanka's democracy. There has been an alarming erosion of FoE&I and a decline of civic space in the country. Authorities are increasingly using the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to [suppress dissent](#). Originally intended to safeguard citizens' rights, the ICCPR Act has been weaponised to target critics and minorities, often under the pretext of combating hate speech. Comedians, poets, and artists are among those who have faced related charges. Repressive measures have also been employed to prosecute journalists, particularly those reporting on ethno-religious issues affecting minority communities. IFEX member Free Media Movement (FMM) utilised the Sri Lanka Protect Civic Space Campaign images and slogans to spotlight these issues in the lead-up to the election.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Shared spaces for exchanging knowledge, building skills, and exploring issues are essential to foster collective learning. These spaces provide members with valuable opportunities to reflect on their practices, share lessons learned, develop new allies, and strengthen the network.

Spaces of Solidarity | Southern Africa

IFEX provided the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) with core funding and strategic assistance in support of the organisation's work strengthening the regional commitment to the promotion and defense of expression in Southern Africa.

In October 2024, MISA hosted their 3rd annual 'Spaces for Solidarity' forum in Namibia. Members from all the MISA chapters and like-minded organisations from the region gathered to advance FoE&I, digital rights, and media literacy issues.

“United in our diversity, we have the capacity to achieve these objectives. With unwavering effort and strength, we can and will build an agile movement with speed!”

Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA)

Cafecitos! | Latin America and the Caribbean

The IFEX-ALC regional network wanted to find a unique way to optimise the diversity and expertise of its members. To enhance learning and knowledge-sharing, the network began to hold regular virtual spaces called “Cafecitos”, where members informally share experiences, identify patterns, and explore strategies in a space for collective inquiry. In 2024, these spaces were led by members with the support of the IFEX-ALC coordinating committee. The November session on “Restrictions by non-state actors: How shadowbanning affects the right to freedom of expression online” was led by Observacom. Other 2024 Cafecitos focused on elections, and how to deal with attacks on CSOs in the region.

“The Cafecito organised by IFEX-ALC was a crucial space to share our concerns about the impact of shadowbanning and content curation exercised by digital platforms on freedom of expression online. It allowed us to convey to IFEX-ALC members the importance of incorporating this issue in their agendas and to find out if other organisations in the network are already working on it in order to coordinate joint actions.”

Observacom

Spotlight: Nigeria

The much-anticipated Nigerian general elections held in 2023 did not improve the health of the country's civic space. Attacks on media included physical assaults, abductions, denials of access to information, and unlawful arrests and detentions. Dangers to journalists intensified in 2024, amidst a massive wave of protests against government policies that spread across the continent, and IFEX members responded.

The International Press Centre (IPC) is dedicated to addressing press freedom violations in the country and making the practice of journalism safer. In 2024, with core funding from IFEX, it was able to strengthen the impact of its Centre for Safety and Protection of Journalists (I-CSPJ) to monitor and tackle impunity for crimes committed against the media. Committed to collaboration, IPC regularly joins forces with fellow IFEX members the Centre for Media and Society (CEMESO) and Media Rights Agenda (MRA) in its work: CEMESO brings a digital rights lens to ATI issues, while MRA provides legal protection mechanisms for journalists.

In response to gendered attacks and in an effort to create a safer work environment and deter future violations, MRA launched a project in 2024 focused on women journalists. It combines raising legal awareness, providing tools for redress, fostering a supportive network, and offering legal assistance to hold perpetrators accountable.

'IFEX's funding and strategic support have been instrumental in making the platform a reality. Through this backing, CEMESO has been able to establish a structured mechanism to document, analyze, and provide a basis for programmatic response to violations against journalists, media practitioners, and human rights defenders.'

Centre for Media and Society (CEMESO)

In this digital age, misinformation and disinformation present pervasive challenges to democracy, undermining the integrity of information and eroding public trust in democratic institutions. IFEX members continue to bring innovative approaches to improve Nigeria's information ecosystem. In 2024 CEMESO launched the [Media Expression Monitoring Dashboard](#), a hub for real-time data on FoE&I abuses in the country. This platform showcases information trends, paying particular attention to crisis and conflict-prone issues. Based on the data collected, monthly reports are then published to provide relevant content on FoE&I and key insights. The initiative, launched with IFEX's strategic and financial assistance, enables evidence-based engagement with policymakers and stakeholders to defend Nigerian press freedom by enhancing public access to data.

The essential work of IFEX members in Nigeria does not come without risk. Lanre Arogundade, a renowned journalist as well as director of IPC, was arrested at the airport in Lagos while he was travelling to participate in the 2024 IFEX Convening in Berlin. Nigerian IFEX members were at the convening at the time he was detained, and the network was able to provide a coordinated response.

PHOTO BY ADEKUNLE AJAYI



Members of civil society groups hold a peaceful protest against economic hardship in Lagos in 2024.



A HOLISTIC APPROACH

86% of members agreed that IFEX has contributed to a safer environment for those exercising their right to FoE&I since 2020.

Not only are we living through the deadliest period for journalists ever witnessed, but heightened conflict, a worsening climate crisis, and growing economic inequalities are contributing to degradation in both safety and justice across many sectors. The impacts are wide ranging, placing journalists, human rights defenders, politicians, writers, musicians, academics and many others – as well as those who defend the FoE&I rights of these individuals – at greater risk.

Online and offline threats and attacks disproportionately impact marginalised individuals. Our sustained collaborations and broad understanding of the FoE&I ecosystem allow IFEX to advance systemic and intersectional responses to these safety challenges.

PHOTO BY ABOOD ABUSALAMA



View of press equipment belonging to Al-Aqsa TV cameraman Mohammed al-Tanani on his body during the funeral ceremony in Gaza in 2024.

Collaboration in Action | IFEX's approach to advocacy

The IFEX network is dedicated to using every available tool to hold those who violate free expression and information rights accountable. Through collective statements and joint advocacy efforts, we shine a spotlight on critical issues, strategically shaping public discourse and influencing policy decisions.

Our advocacy is rooted in our commitment to accountability to IFEX members and a deep respect for their expertise. We engage local actors early in the process, ensuring their concerns are heard and prioritizing the safety of those on the frontlines.

Decisions on our use of the IFEX voice are guided by a strategic understanding of our unique role as a global network. We leverage existing resources and align our actions with shared strategic priorities. We tailor our approaches to the specific context, always focusing on the most effective approach for each situation and in close collaboration with members. With a long-term outlook, we view every action as part of a sustained commitment, knowing we will continue to support our members over the long haul.

A RADICAL RESET FOR JOURNALIST SAFETY

Delivered in partnership with three other feminist-led organisations – ACOS Alliance, International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), and Media Defence – the [Safety in Numbers](#) (SIN) program works to enhance a culture of safety through the cooperation of media organisations, civil society, and legal experts. Through our combined connections with over 375 partners in more than 115 countries, the programme integrates diverse perspectives and resources to build a robust, sustainable ecosystem for the protection of journalists.

The program, which gained momentum in 2024, has a special focus on those who are most marginalised due to their intersecting identities, as well as on journalists and CSOs working in exile.

Some of the actions that IFEX led in 2024 as part of the SIN program include:

- ▶ **Providing financial support and strategic advice to member organisations working in high risk contexts.** The grants focused on delivering legal support and legal training to journalists, as well as advocating to improve legal guarantees and enhance their physical and digital safety. All five projects shared a focus on women journalists, who face increased risks doing their work.
- ▶ **Contributing to the preparation of the Summit of the Future.** We provided feedback for the outcome documents that would shape the direction of the multilateral system, namely the Pact for the Future and the Global Digital Compact. We emphasised the importance of ensuring the safety of journalists and the need for accountability from states, companies, and other stakeholders.
- ▶ **Promoting cross-regional understanding.** We published a [two-part series](#) [↗](#) that explored the safety issues that push journalists and human rights defenders in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean into exile. It identified some regional commonalities and described ways CSOs are supporting those in exile.
- ▶ **Submitting a case to the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) related to the safety of women journalists in Guyana.** The case asked for guarantees to do their work safely and established a channel for providing regular updates and guidance on recommended actions to concerned MFC member states.

In the context of the IFEX Convening in April we hosted a meeting that brought together all the SIN program partners. We were able to strengthen and broaden connections between members across the network dedicated to promoting the safety of journalists.



PHOTO BY TCHANDROU NITANGA

Journalist Floriane Irangabiye speaks to the media after leaving Bubanza prison following a presidential pardon in Burundi in 2024.

WHAT DOES A HOLISTIC SAFETY APPROACH INCLUDE?

PHYSICAL SAFETY

Equipping journalists to mitigate threats to their physical safety and supporting responsive measures following violations.

DIGITAL SAFETY

Preparing journalists to mitigate digital threats and supporting responsive measures following violations to their digital rights and safety.

LEGAL SAFETY

Establishing long-term relationships, models, and expertise to legally support journalists.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SAFETY

Facilitating and delivering highly sensitive and individualised support that fits with local and personal perspectives of mental health and wellbeing.

An ecosystem lens

Our organic collaboration with SIN partners has strengthened our ability to harness and enhance existing initiatives, networks, and experiences. By deepening and multiplying relationships in the ecosystem, our impact extends further.

The collaborative culture that underpins the consortium allows us to:

- ▶ Gain better and more regular insights from local stakeholders.
- ▶ Improve connections and pool knowledge from a broader range of experts.
- ▶ Enable more strategic advocacy and programmatic support.
- ▶ Facilitate more strategic engagement with regional and international mechanisms.

PROTECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

CSOs play a key role in shedding light on abuses, promoting an increased commitment from state and non-state actors to protect journalists, and advocating for accountability.

The war on media | Syria

Syria has long been one of the world’s deadliest and riskiest countries for journalists, with 141 journalists killed between 2011 and 2024. Actions to hold those responsible for the crimes accountable are needed to support a safer future.

In May 2024, marking World Press Freedom Day, the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) held exhibitions in Qamishli (Syria) and Paris (France) to honour media victims of the war and to raise awareness of impunity for crimes against journalists. SCM worked closely with families of those murdered or forcibly disappeared, and made special efforts to identify and honour women journalists.

Visitors to the exhibit included families of the killed, law enforcement officials, journalists, and media representatives. SCM made Arabic and Kurdish translations of “Guidelines for Prosecutors on Cases of Crimes against Journalists” available, and launched a social media campaign to amplify key messages around journalist safety and protection in English, Arabic, and Kurdish.

Journalists carry photos of journalists killed in attacks by the Bashar al-Assad regime and its supporters during a World Press Freedom Day demonstration in Idlib, Syria, in 2024.



PHOTO BY IZETTIN KASIM



People take part in a rally calling for an end to the persecution of journalists and for the release of journalist Bolot Temirov in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in 2022.

Pushing back on independent media repression | Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan has witnessed deteriorating rights to FoE&I in recent years, including shutdowns or restriction on the activities of independent media outlets. The forced closure of the Kloop media organisation in August 2024 was part of a broader pattern of media repression.

In response, IFEX reached out to Kyrgyz members Media Policy Institute (MPI) and Public Association “Journalists” (PAJ) to contribute to a submission we made to member states through the Media Freedom Coalition. The initiative aimed to stop the forced closure of independent media and contribute to a strengthened normative environment, working towards improved justice for those experiencing FoE&I violations. Ultimately, the decision to close Kloop was overturned.

Legal protections for journalists | West Africa

Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) is a regional organisation that works with a network of members to advance towards a freer and safer environment for independent journalism and expression in the region, both online and off.

Having the right information at hand is critical for any advocacy work. IFEX provided MFWA with funding to produce six country reports analysing the laws that are restrictive for press freedom, and the legal challenges hindering the fight against impunity. They cover Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, and Togo.

What the reports found | Obstacles to combating impunity in West Africa

- ▶ Laws couched in broad and vague terms
- ▶ Lack of regulatory independence
- ▶ Financial constraints vis-a-vis cost of litigation
- ▶ Security agents, particularly the police, major perpetrators of press freedom violations
- ▶ Public officials and other powerful individuals and groups chief complainants and instigators of arrests
- ▶ Private settlements of cases with perpetrators
- ▶ Governments’ use of sophisticated surveillance
- ▶ Lack of safety policies/training on media laws by media houses
- ▶ Declining public support and solidarity

IFEX support also went toward a forum hosted by MFWA where it launched a regional network of lawyers for media defense. The West Africa Network of Activists and Media Defense Lawyers (WANAMDEL) was officially inaugurated in Accra on 9 October 2024, with 13 lawyers in attendance from Senegal, Togo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Côte d’Ivoire, Benin, The Gambia, and Ghana.

WANAMDEL is already providing timely and effective legal assistance to victims of FoE&I violations and has also been advocating for the safety of journalists. It will contribute to improving justice for journalists by providing pro-bono legal services as well as creating a toolkit to enhance understanding of legal frameworks.

TAKING ON CLIMATE (IN)JUSTICE

Reporting on environmental devastation is becoming increasingly dangerous. According to UNESCO, in the period between 2009-2023 at least 749 journalists and news media outlets reporting on environmental issues were targeted with murder, physical violence, arrest, online harassment, or legal attacks. Many IFEX members across various regions are tackling this

issue head-on through research, advocacy, training, and other forms of support. We continue to build allyships with other actors working on environmental issues as well as across different sectors.

Defending the defenders through the power of community | Cambodia

In the context of the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) we published a [special brief](#) on threats to Cambodian environmental activists and land rights defenders and the work of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) and other CSOs, underscoring the connection between promoting free speech and environmental advocacy. CCHR has amplified its support to communities through training and workshops on the right to access information and relevant laws on environment and political advocacy.

PHOTO BY TANG CHHIN SOTHY



Cambodian environmental activists sit outside a municipal court during a sentencing hearing in Phnom Penh in 2024.

“Land and environmental activists have utilised their freedom of expression and right to information through peaceful assemblies, complaints, petitions, and social media to seek solutions and urge the government to protect the environment.”

Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS | CALLING ON THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Centre for International Environmental Law invited IFEX to sign on to a [statement](#) demanding the Council of Europe sign a protocol on a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. The Campaign brought together CSOs and Indigenous Peoples organisations from across Europe. If signed, the protocol will contribute to strengthening the normative environment to protect journalists and environmental human rights defenders and send an unequivocal message of solidarity.



PHOTO BY HUGO ALEJOS

Members of different indigenous communities take part in a protest on their way to the Supreme Court of Justice in Ucayali, Peru, in 2024.

No Just Transition without human rights

Transition to a net-zero, low-carbon, and sustainable economy is imperative, and must not come at the expense of people. As states continue to pursue environmentally destructive economic policies and activities, the work of environmental defenders and journalists who shine a light on the resulting harms, abuses, and disproportionate impacts – and find ways to equitably address them – is essential.

IFEX responded to a [call](#) for inputs from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human rights (OHCHR) for a report on Just Transition and Human Rights. Our [submission](#) emphasised that the protection and promotion of the rights of environmental defenders and journalists is necessary to achieve a just transition. We highlighted the importance of a multistakeholder approach – particularly including affected communities – and issued a set of

recommendations to States on how to uphold their human rights obligations:

- ▶ Adhere to obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as other relevant legal and normative frameworks concerning the environment at the international and regional level;
- ▶ Commit to upholding the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, including by holding companies accountable and ensuring new and existing regulations and enforcement are rooted in principles of human rights and environmental law;
- ▶ Guarantee equitable, inclusive, and meaningful participation of environmental defenders, journalists, activists, civil society organisations, and others in political and economic decision-making and policy processes that advance a sustainable economy, particularly centring the experiences of communities most vulnerable to the climate crisis; and
- ▶ Guarantee a safe and enabling environment for free expression and access to information by ensuring environmental defenders, journalists, activists, civil society organisations, and others are not subject to censorship and reprisals.

Spotlight: Belarus

Since 2020, IFEX has continually monitored the situation in Belarus, sharing monthly updates via the [Belarus Chronology of Repression and Resistance](#), which has proven to be a useful resource for CSOs and others advocating for FoE&I rights in the country. The Chronology captures how the context for FoE&I in Belarus has become even more fraught after the contentious re-election of President Lukashenko in August 2020.

Repression escalated alarming levels over the past year. At the end of December, IFEX member the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) reported that there were 45 journalists imprisoned in the country. Almost all media outlets, and BAJ as well, have been declared “extremist organisations”, severely hampering their operations and impacting access to information.

Attacks against those working in exile have also intensified. Journalists and rights defenders have received written and phone threats from the authorities, faced trials in absentia, and witnessed their relatives in Belarus suffer pressure. Some exiled BAJ members had their apartments in Belarus seized.

Despite these serious challenges to their work, the necessarily decentralised working model is enabling them to engage more directly in advocacy with governments in the region. With most staff forced to relocate, IFEX has supported BAJ’s efforts with local and national governments to secure their basic living needs.

“We would like to applaud the IFEX team for profound advocacy efforts in Canada and globally, including the elaboration and promotion of a Brief to the Parliament of Canada that can eventually lead to Parliamentary hearings on the situation of Belarusian independent mass media and journalists.”

Belarusian Association of Journalists



PHOTO BY IFEX

Members of the IFEX Secretariat hold photos of imprisoned Belarusian journalists in Toronto in 2023.

As part of IFEX support to strengthen international awareness of ongoing repression and human rights violations in the country, we worked with BAJ on a brief to the Canadian Parliament’s Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (SDIR) in December 2023. The brief provided an overview of the challenges faced by journalists and civil society and called for a study on the state of media and civic space in Belarus.

At the IFEX Convening in April, space was created at BAJ’s request to discuss new and pressing challenges. It was a critical opportunity to strategise with other stakeholders about how to coordinate and engage in strategic advocacy. The IFEX Secretariat and the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) joined their discussion later, offering insights into international organisations and mechanisms to leverage in order to place pressure on Belarusian authorities and secure the release of jailed journalists.

In December 2024, following our continued engagement with the MFC on the situation in Belarus, four MFC member states issued statements condemning the increased detentions of journalists.



COUNTERING INEQUITIES

89% of members agreed that IFEX has successfully and measurably confronted challenges to access to information, its circulation, and its integrity.

Recognising the power that the free flow of information brings to communities, authoritarian actors and states restrict independent communications sources and channels in order to shape and monopolise the dominant narratives, and 2024 was no exception. The consolidation and control of the media, including social media, is stifling the free exchange of ideas, eroding access to information, and fueling polarisation.

Information inequities disproportionately affect those who have historically been excluded from information ecosystems and who face intersecting barriers to access information. Systemic issues such as misogyny, racism, classism, and ableism play a critical role in our ability to access accurate information in meaningful ways.

PHOTO BY DERECHOS DIGITALES



Lucía Camacho, Public Policy Coordinator for Derechos Digitales, speaks during the pre-session of the Universal Periodic Review on Chile.

ADVANCING THE VISION OF THOSE ON THE GROUND

Throughout 2024, IFEX members worked to ensure that the perspectives of affected communities were heard in decision-making spaces and that community-led information initiatives could thrive.

Advocacy at the UN | Chile

The effectiveness of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process requires that its recommendations are followed by States. IFEX provided funding to Derechos Digitales to carry out direct advocacy at the UN ahead of Chile's 4th UPR, which took place on 30 April 2024.

In order to bring a more intentional, systemic, and intersectional lens to FoE&I issues, Derechos Digitales collaborated with Amaranta ONG and Miles Chile, two organisations working on sexual and reproductive rights, ahead of the review. Through their coalition, they were able to showcase the impacts of online gender-based violence as well as the effects that the digital divide is having on indigenous and rural populations, specifically. The report explored the barriers that women living in remote areas face in accessing information due to limited internet access, and the impact on their ability to exercise sexual and reproductive rights, given that most health centres are located in urban areas.

“We learned that the advocacy process during the UPR pre-sessions must necessarily be a collective effort, accompanied by organisations that share multiple interests [...] the more diverse and numerous the group requesting meetings and appointments with delegations from countries in Geneva, the greater the likelihood of a positive response to arrange information exchange meetings.”

Derechos Digitales

The advocacy efforts of Derechos Digitales in Geneva were very successful. By sharing the report with key delegations, key recommendations related to gender and access to information were included. The work gave greater visibility to threats faced by human rights defenders and other vulnerable groups, and articulated clear calls to action, reiterating Chile's outstanding commitments.

Battling misinformation in a context of conflict | Lebanon

The escalation of Israeli attacks on Lebanon caused massive civilian casualties and displaced thousands of people. In a country that was already grappling with a severe economic crisis, the invasion and bombardment worsened living conditions and created further uncertainty for its citizens.

Barriers to accessing information and the spread of misinformation during a crisis can generate further chaos. In 2024, after a successful jointly-funded

project with Maharat in 2023, we partnered on another joint application to secure resources to reinforce journalists' ability to report fully, accurately, freely, and safely in Lebanon. This project has significantly contributed to enhancing the quality and integrity of journalism, promoting transparency, and advocating for journalists' protection.

The work enabled Maharat to launch an active newsroom that monitors public discourse and produces stories that correct misinformation. In addition, Maharat launched a six-month fellowship program for young journalists, targeting topics related to governance, transparency, fact-checking, and access to information. The participants of the program, mostly women, were supported through mentorship and training.

A journalist reports next to the wreckage of a car targeted by an Israeli drone strike on the Beirut-Damascus road in the Kakhale area in 2024.



PHOTO BY AFP

In this second iteration of the project, we were able to expand in scale and scope. This included inviting IFEX member GCHR into the partnership. In December 2024, they organised an in-person Digital Security and Legal Safety workshop aimed at enhancing the safety of civil society partners and journalists. It included a discussion on attacks on human rights defenders' credibility, the nature of their work, and the tools they use. In preparation for Lebanon's next Universal Periodic Review process at the UN, GCHR and IFEX will collaborate on strengthening advocacy and campaigning efforts.

Protecting critical voices | Nigeria

Under the stated aim of protecting citizens, the government of Nigeria approved a Cybercrime Act in 2015 that restricted access to social media and gagged dissenting voices. While the law was amended in February 2024, it is still being used [↗](#) to prosecute journalists.

To counter these abuses, and with financial assistance from IFEX, CEMESO developed a training program on Digital Autonomy and Resilience for Nigerian media workers and digital rights actors. The in-person training, held on 13-14 March in Lagos, worked to enhance understanding of online censorship and cyberattacks.

CEMESO also hosted a virtual session that introduced journalists and media professionals to digital tools and resources. A second virtual session focused on online harms for human rights defenders working with marginalised groups, including youth, people with disabilities, vulnerable online groups, and women journalists.

“This training has been an eye-opener. I now understand how to identify false information, verify sources, and protect myself online. More importantly, I am ready to pass on this knowledge to others in my community.”

Train the Trainers program participant

A Train the Trainers' version was developed to extend the program's reach. Ten people, mainly journalists and media professionals, have received training so far to bring the program back to their communities.

Connecting local contexts to global agendas | Mongolia

IFEX has been working closely with Globe International Center (GIC) to promote the free flow of information in Mongolia and uphold its democracy and civic society. IFEX has supported the organisation with funding to advance its programs and activities as it works hand-in-hand with other civil society actors for a more robust democracy.

GIC hosted seven thematic and multi-sectoral discussions related to FoE&I over the course of this 2023-2024 project. The sessions, attended by more than 335 participants, offered a unique opportunity for GIC to collaborate with local stakeholders, international organisations, and government institutions, drawing linkages between the local and regional trends and broader international experiences.

ACTION TO (RE)SHAPE DIGITAL NORMS AND STANDARDS

Online communications and burgeoning technologies offer new opportunities for connection, communication, expression, and information sharing, but they must be developed and applied in line with human rights. Digital platforms threaten to widen inequalities and deepen systems of oppression. Technologies, including AI, are being used in a way that amplifies the dangers of surveillance, disinformation, and the manipulation of elections. The picture becomes even more complex when laws and regulations designed to counter these threats are weaponised for censorship and control. This situation must be tackled through coordinated international cooperation. As a global network, IFEX is uniquely positioned to convene and connect actors to advance common agendas around digital rights.



PHOTO BY FAROOQ NAEEM

A man uses the social media platform X on his phone at a market in Islamabad after more than two months of disruption ordered by the Interior Ministry in 2024.

Countering restrictive laws | Pakistan

Pakistan has experienced a rapid decline of freedoms following the February 2024 election. Restrictions on FoE&I included internet disruptions, online censorship and phone suspensions. Against this backdrop, legislative proposals to further regulate the digital environment raised additional concerns.

In August, IFEX released a [statement](#) that highlights how legislation to address digital issues in Pakistan is creating a repressive and over-regulated environment that is suffocating FoE&I. There is insufficient input and oversight by civil society, media, and other relevant stakeholders. The legislation also risks intensifying negative impacts on women and marginalised communities, as has been seen in the implementation of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). Our statement identified a series of laws that exacerbate the already-repressive online environment by increasing censorship online, implementing harsh penalties for online defamation, and expanding surveillance.

Collaboration on global digital rights

The UN Convention Against Cybercrime is intended to prevent and combat cybercrime at an international level. While the dangers it aims to address are real, the treaty could harm not only access to information, but free expression and privacy rights.

Since 2023, IFEX has collaborated with members and allies to raise awareness among the IFEX network and other stakeholders about the convention's shortcomings, and has joined efforts to call on negotiating parties to address these in the final text. In January 2024, IFEX signed and circulated among the network a [statement](#) led by our ally Access Now in partnership with IFEX members ARTICLE 19, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Human Rights Watch, and Privacy International calling for changes to the treaty to better safeguard human rights. During the subsequent process, industry and civil society found common ground and produced an [open letter](#) with shared concerns.

As the final decision approached, IFEX signed an [urgent appeal](#) addressed to the delegations of the Member States of the EU and the European Commission stating that, absent meaningful changes, the treaty should be rejected.

The Convention was adopted, but CSO efforts were not in vain. The final draft made it clear that implementation must be consistent with obligations under international human rights law, with specific reference to the rights to freedom of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly, and association, and a list of cybercrime offences that would criminalise free expression was ultimately dropped after civil society advocated against including speech-related offenses.

CHAMPIONS OF ACCESS TO AND INTEGRITY OF INFORMATION

IFEX's [Faces of Free Expression](#) project shares the stories of individuals who are leading some of the most

important struggles of our time, and whose work and tenacity are an inspiration. In 2024, IFEX published two new profiles with a focus on access to information.

[Sulemana Braimah](#) | Former journalist and long standing Ghanaian advocate, Braimah is the Executive Director of Media Foundation for West Africa. He is a key figure in the defense and promotion of information integrity and reliability in the region.

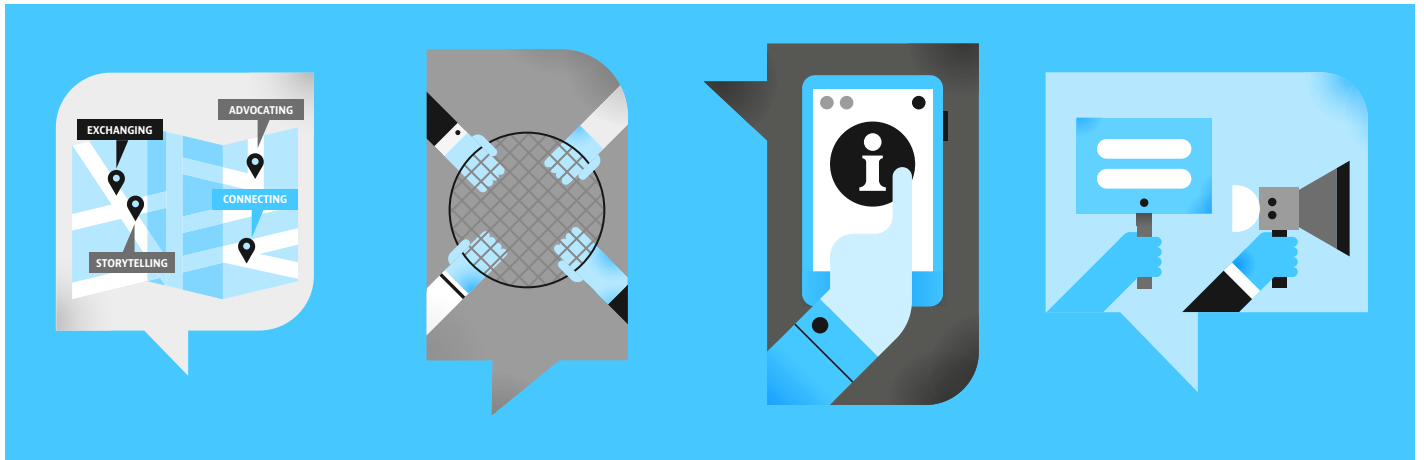
[Patricia Campos Mello](#) | A Brazilian journalist, Campos Mello was subjected to a gender-focused smear and disinformation campaign after publishing an article that exposed a campaign by some of President Bolsonaro's backers to flood Whatsapp with misinformation. She fought back and eventually achieved a legal victory.



PHOTO BY FLORIAN NICOLLE

Patricia Campos Mello portrait illustration created for the Faces of Free Expression series.

A new Strategic Plan



Over the course of the year, valuable input from IFEX members and allies shaped an exciting new [Strategic Plan and Theory of Change for 2025-2029](#). It builds on the proven strengths of the network and the lessons learned to ensure that IFEX remains an effective force at the heart of the free expression community, upholding the right to FoE&I.

We are making some key adjustments to further deepen the impact and sustainability of our work, while keeping firm hold of what makes IFEX successful.

The thematic goal areas developed for the 2020-2024 plan – civic space, access to information, and safety and justice – have proven extremely effective and will be carried forward. Following our success integrating equity and inclusion as a cross-cutting theme – which has resulted in surpassing our targets and bringing this lens more organically to all our work – we will integrate network-building across all goal areas. This includes activities aimed at enhancing member organisational capacity and connections between members, while strengthening and diversifying connections with allies.

We will bring intersectional responses to the growing impacts of technologies, including AI. We are also committed to promoting FoE&I rights among those addressing and sharing information on environmental issues.

We will continue our innovative and collaborative approach to establishing a holistic safety context for those whose FoE&I rights are most at risk and those who defend them. This includes journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society organisations – particularly those most marginalised due to their intersecting identities.

This new plan was designed to inform our work as we tackle existing and emerging realities over the next five years. Given the difficult context in which it is being launched, including the global rise in authoritarianism, increased conflict and polarisation, and rapidly diminishing resources for human rights work, we are doubling down on our approach. Where realism dictates that in some cases our focus will need to be on resisting declines in FoE&I rights, we remain resolute in our critical purpose and value in advancing them.

Members have continuously shared that while many elements contribute to the power of IFEX, it is the solidarity and opportunities for collaboration that are key to our success as a network. This is truly the foundation of IFEX and our work, and what makes us unique. The new plan forefronts this shared commitment to connections, solidarity, and knowledge sharing, in line with our collaboration principles, as we develop into an even stronger network to take on the challenges ahead, together.

IFEX Dispatches from 2024

A NETWORK THAT WORKS

PHOTO CREDITS

NETWORK BUILDING: IFEX MEMBERS HUGGING DURING THE 2024 CONVENING IN BERLIN. PHOTO BY IFEX

CIVIC SPACE: INDIGENOUS WOMEN FROM ARGENTINA AND BOLIVIA DURING A DEMONSTRATION IN BUENOS AIRES IN 2024. PHOTO BY RICARDO CEPPI

SAFETY & JUSTICE: JOURNALISTS TAKE PART IN A STREET PROTEST AS THEY DISPLAY PLACARDS CALLING FOR THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS AND RESPECT FOR MEDIA FREEDOMS IN NAIROBI IN 2024. PHOTO BY TONY KARUMBA

ACCESS TO INFORMATION: AN INDIGENOUS ORANG ASLI TEENAGER SITS ON THE EDGE OF A VILLAGE TO ACCESS THE INTERNET VIA A SMARTPHONE IN PAHANG, MALAYSIA, IN 2024. PHOTO BY ANNICE LYN

*MEMBER AGREEMENT PERCENTAGES TAKEN FROM 2024 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF IFEX'S 2020-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN.