

Free Expression Legal Network Launch-20250218

February 18, 2025,

Opening Remarks by [Dario Milo](#)

Thank you, Nicole.

I would like to welcome all of you to our offices and especially those who are attending today with, in light of the gloomy weather that we are experiencing, which you cannot tell me, going to get worse tomorrow.

I speak to you as host and as the head of our media law team here with Wenzel and importantly, as a member of the Steering committee which we call referred to the freedom of expression Lawyers network, which we launched today. Has been cheaply, I think, dubbed by Anton as felon until we come up with a better acronym.

So we ask you to help us with that first and foremost.

I want to acknowledge the many media lawyers who are friends and colleagues in the room.

I'm not sure what the collective noun is for us.

Perhaps a motion of media lawyers for our advocate friends.

Maybe barristers?

Not sure ... enough of the dead jokes.

Our meeting here is to discuss the importance of a network of free speech lawyers, and it comes at a time when, in South Africa, while we have a growing and rich body of jurisprudence protecting freedom of expression and media freedom, in no part no small part due to.

The efforts of many people in this room, we see new challenges to truth tellers.

These challenges are not unique to South Africa.

They have a challenges truth tellers face around the globe, and we have a session later.

We will hear a bit more about that.

Esoteric areas of law, in my experience of being weaponized to chill free speech. In our practice we see increasing resort to using areas of law not typically associated with media law to punish the press.

There is an increase in harassment cases in the managers court against journalists, bogus criminal charges or civil cases based on allegations that crimes have been committed.

Such as the multi litigation against Anna Bulgaria recently, the abuse of data protection law and even a private prosecution against journalists, strategic lawsuits against public participation. Slaps are on the increase even as our law gives us some tools to fight back.

Access to information cases favour the media, but the long and winding road to disclosure requires requesters to train for a double marathon.
Not a Sprint.

The tech platforms Gobbler advertising revenue meant for the media, while AI companies train on media content with impunity.

And in this Trump inspired era where disinformation rules the breathing space for legitimate, accurate speech on public interest matters are closing.

We can't solve all these problems through this network, but we think we can help those who most need expert legal assistance on matters that affect them at the coalface.

My hope is that this network will serve not only as a platform for collaboration of experts in the field but will have real practical impact on those for those who need our services but lack resources.

Let me move on to the other task I have here today, which is:

to introduce [Judge Navi Pillay](#), who we honoured has accepted our invitation to give our keynote address.

As I said to her outside and take our full two hours this afternoon to do justice.
To her career.

So if you in the very unlikely position of not knowing other achievements, a quick Google search will solve that.

I will emphasise here today that Judge Pillay has enjoyed an illustrious legal career as a former judge of our High Court, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and International Criminal Court, as well as being the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2008.

To 2014, her contributions to International Criminal law groundbreaking.

Particularly her role in International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, where she was instrumental in developing jurisprudence on crimes against humanity, the prosecution of rape as a war crime, and sexual violence as an act of genocide.

And she's currently serving as an ad hoc judge of the International Court of Justice.

In short, judge Pillay is no stranger to the world of human rights activism.

And she's a renowned international lawyer.

Who better to set the scene for us down today?

Over a decade ago in words that still ring true, Judge Pillay addressed the OSCE Permanent Council, underscoring the vital role of media freedom and access to information, she said.

At its essence, democracy is about every person participating in decisions that affect their own lives.

These simply cannot be attained without adequate access to information and the right to express opinions.

It's a privilege to call on Judge Pillay to share her wisdom with us.

I thank you.