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# Namibia Media Professionals Union (NAMPU)

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3 May 2021

## For Immediate Release

### **NAMIBIAN JOURNALISTS STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH COLLEAGUES IN ICELAND**

The safety of journalists and media workers, online and offline, is one of the key agenda points that enjoyed prominence at the celebrations of the World Press Freedom Day being hosted in Namibia, on Monday 3 2021.

As the celebration of global press freedom peaks in Windhoek, the Namibia Media Professionals Union (NAMPU) is alerted to the incidents happening in Iceland, a country which is fast becoming unsafe for journalists to work in.

NAMPU has been reliably informed that since news of Namibia's biggest known corruption scandal - Fishrot - implicating prominent politicians and large corporations broke in November 2019, journalists working on the story in Iceland have faced a sustained campaign of bullying and harassment.

The Icelandic company at the centre of the corruption allegations, Samherji, has used various tactics to intimidate reporters including spreading disinformation, launching attack videos, and instances of direct harassment, in a bid to silence claims about the company's alleged corrupt activities in Namibia.

NAMPU condemns Samherji's actions in this regard and urges the company to immediately stop the harassment of journalists working on the Fishrot story.

The company, while having the right to respond to the claims against it, should not seek to suppress public scrutiny of its role in the Fishrot scandal.

We stand in solidarity with our colleagues in Iceland who have now fallen victim to Samherji's intimidation and harassment because of their work on the Fishrot corruption.

In addition, we call on the employers of journalists and the authorities dealing with media freedom in Iceland to do their utmost to ensure reporters can continue to work in the public interest by exposing corruption.

Journalists should also have the right to defend themselves against Samherji's attacks on their own social media accounts.

Lastly, we encourage journalists around the world, and especially in Europe, to offer their support to their Icelandic colleagues and condemn intimidation from commercial entities.

### **Background note:**

Helgi Seljan and Adalsteinn Kjartansson are journalists working for RUV, Iceland's public broadcaster. At the end of 2019, Seljan and Kjartansson reported for the documentary series Kveikur

on the Fishrot scandal - which centres on allegations that the Icelandic fishing company, Samherji, paid millions of dollars in bribes to a small group of Namibian politicians and business people in order to gain access to Namibia's horse mackerel stocks over a period of more than six years.

Kveikur has broadcast a series of follow-up reports on the scandal which has seen two former Namibian Cabinet Ministers arrested and three leading figures in Samherji arraigned in Namibia on charges including fraud, money laundering and racketeering.

Several principals of Samherji are also the subject of an ongoing criminal investigation in Iceland.

Since 2020 journalists working on the Fishrot corruption stories have come under sustained attack from Samherji in a bid to silence claims about the company's alleged corrupt activities in Namibia.

Seljan has been repeatedly harassed by a private investigator apparently working for Samherji.

While Seljan has been the primary focus of Samherji's campaign, the company has also targeted 11 other RUV journalists.

Samherji has also run attack ads on YouTube that are based on disinformation.

After Keikur's reporters and other journalists at RUV took to social media to defend themselves against Samherji's claims, the company filed an ethics complaint against 11 of them, accusing them of breaching an internal rule set by RUV that states journalists are not allowed to express their opinions about controversial subjects on social media.

Namibia has been Africa's best-ranked country in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index since 2019.

Namibia is currently ranked at 24th on the Index while Iceland is eight places ahead at 16th.

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