

LIBREVILLE, June 10 (Infosplusgabon) - The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has announced on Wednesday that Executive Director Joel Simon has informed the board of directors that he will step down by the end of the year after almost a quarter century at the organization, including 15 years in his current role.

Board Chair Kathleen Carroll will lead a committee of board members to identify a successor to Simon, who will assist with the transition. CPJ has engaged Spencer Stuart, a global executive search and leadership advisory firm, to help with its search.

Executive Director Joel Simon will step down by the end of 2021 after 15 years in the role

Joel Simon, 56, joined CPJ as Americas program coordinator in 1997 and became deputy director in 1999. He was appointed executive director in 2006. Under his leadership, CPJ has won the release of hundreds of imprisoned journalists around the world and fought to ensure justice on behalf of those murdered for their work. He has led CPJ's efforts to become a trusted source of news and data on press freedom violations, including killing and jailing of journalists, with an international network of correspondents.

"Joel has been a tremendous leader for CPJ, guiding the organization's growth and impact with great vision and skill. He lives and breathes the mission to help journalists in trouble and hundreds of them are safer because of his work. And today, CPJ is stronger and more vital than it has ever been," Carroll said. "I understand and support Joel's desire to step down later this year after 15 years at the helm and explore new opportunities. He is uniquely talented, and it has been a great joy to work with him. I am confident he will have substantial impact in the next chapter of his professional life."

Simon has led CPJ through a period of significant expansion, growing its global staff to 40, creating a North America program focused on press freedom advocacy in the United States, and helping to develop an Emergencies team that provides life-saving support to journalists and media support staff through up-to-date safety and security information and direct assistance to those at risk. Simon also launched the Global Campaign Against Impunity, a permanent effort to secure justice for journalists murdered in retaliation for their reporting.

“The free flow of information within communities and across borders must be the basis of a fair and just global society. During nearly a quarter century at the Committee to Protect Journalists, I am proud to have contributed to the defense of this fundamental right by standing up for press freedom and journalists everywhere,” Simon said.

Threats to press freedom have increased with a global rise of authoritarianism in recent years. In 2020, a record 274 journalists were unjustly imprisoned, according to CPJ’s annual census of journalists jailed worldwide, while the number of journalists singled out for murder more than doubled from the previous year. This year, at least seven journalists have been killed in the line of duty.

“Over the years, we’ve had many inspiring victories – and some heartbreaking defeats,” Simon said. “But as with all essential struggles the work is never complete. I’ve given my all during my time at CPJ and as I take on new challenges my desire is to ensure that CPJ is in the best position in the years ahead to advance in the fulfillment of its mission: Ensuring that journalists everywhere are able to work freely and safely, without fear of reprisal.”

CPJ’s annual budget has tripled during Simon’s tenure to more than \$10 million, and the organization has helped secure its future with the purchase of a new headquarters in New York City with the support of the Knight Foundation and other funders.

The Committee to Protect Journalists is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide. We defend the right of journalists to report the news safely and without fear of reprisal. Media Contact CPJ : press@cpj.org

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