

## The Ruth First Courageous Journalism Award

**T**HE Ruth First award honours journalism that is bold, independent, investigative, politically courageous, personally engaged and which raises as many social questions as it answers.

Instead of flash-in-the-pan bravery — which we have seen around us very recently with journalists from all over visiting Rwanda, the Congo, Kenya and putting themselves in the front line of wars, conflict and terrorism — the judges were looking for the kind of journalism that is sustained and which has true social relevance for a vast majority of the citizens of this country.

This was found in the work of the three journalists short-listed for the award: Mungo Soggot of the Mail&Guardian; Christina Stucky, editor of Reconstruct and William Mervin Gumede, of the Sunday Independent.

To select these three finalists the judges looked closely at how the applicants got their information and how they developed it.

Runner-up Mungo Soggot of the Mail&Guardian was commended for developing sources over the years who trusted him and who, when the time was ripe, leaked to him the story about the Central Energy Fund and the men involved, Liberian Immanuel Shaw and head of the fund Don Mkhwanazi.

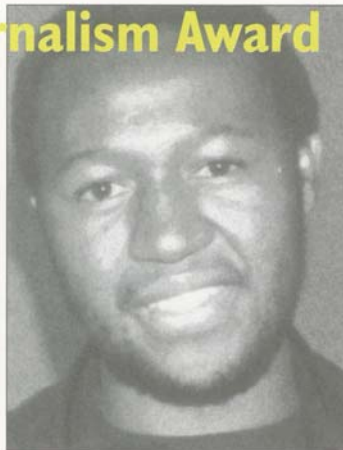
He developed this story very well and clung to it tenaciously. He didn't drop the story after the first sensation hit the pages of the Mail&Guardian.

His skill as a journalist also lay in disentangling the maze of confusing aspects surrounding the Central Energy Fund and in not fearing to challenge the accountability of public figures, despite strong opposition to the stories.

Second runner-up Christina Stucky scored high on "sticking it out" in areas of journalism which traditionally get little support — developmental and women's issues. "Her work is important and well done. She focuses on all spheres of South African life and not just on the power people in our society," the judges said.

Stucky constantly had to challenge walls of resistance in the form of gender-unfriendly and urban mindsets within the media itself, first of all to go and gather the material, and then to present it in such a way as to make it meaningful, relevant and interesting to both readers and editors.

Stucky exemplifies journalism that is personally engaged and which raises as many social questions as it answers. In its own way this kind of journalism is bold and independent as she often



William Mervin Gumede, winner of the Courageous Journalism Award for 1998.

travelled into areas usually avoided by journalists to get her stories.

There was no doubt in the judges' minds that William Mervin Gumede, who investigated tension within the South African National Civic Organisation, disagreements within the ANC tripartite alliance and confusion and acrimony around the position of provincial premiers, demonstrated himself to be the winner of this award.

The judges commended him for "his tenacity in doggedly pursuing unpopular angles to sensitive and important stories, that not only involved internal party politics, but also looked into how these developments affect the broader community."

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## The MISA Press Freedom Award

**T**HE 1998 Media Institute of Southern Africa's (MISA) Press Freedom award has been awarded to the African Eye News Service in recognition of the agency's courage, professionalism, consistency and defence of media freedoms against all odds. The award, which carries a cash prize of US\$1 000, is presented annually to honour excellence in journalism and work which has made a significant contribution to media freedom in the region. It is the first time in the history of the MISA Press Freedom Award that the award has been given to a courageous and outstanding media institution rather than an individual.

Based in the province of Mpumalanga, AEENS has established itself as one of the sub-region's truly investigative news services. In its three years of existence, under the editorship of Justin Arenstein, African Eye has either halted or uncovered a series of corrupt practices in the public sector — some of which have led to public commissions of inquiry, or resignations of the affected officials. Its bold and extremely courageous reporting has earned it several enemies in both the public and private sectors of the South African community. The agency has attracted numerous multi-million rand defamation suits, and to date it has won every case.

Its journalists, especially Arenstein, have also been the targets of physical and verbal harassment, including death threats and threats of assault, while also being personally maligned. Despite this harassment and hostility, the AEENS team has carried on its mission with excellence, exhibiting mature and professional journalism with depth and carefully verified detail.



The African Eye News Service team. PIC BY STEVE HILTON-BARBER

The AEENS team of journalists has painfully realised that good journalism cannot be achieved without parallel advocacy action to enhance access to public information. They successfully lobbied for public access to all committee sessions of provincial legislatures, as well as for access to the budgetary formulation process in the Mpumalanga legislature. In addition, they successfully lobbied for members of the public to be allowed to table written questions at portfolio committee sessions. In very practical ways, therefore, AEENS has been an effective advocacy arm campaigning on issues of freedom of expression, media freedom and public access to information — the ideals which are at the centre of MISA's work.

## The Nat Nakasa Award

**"N**AT Nakasa would have been comfortable in journalism today," said Joe Thloloe of the Drum writer.

"While we were scruffy and smelt of booze and tobacco, Nat was dapper and tidy."

Nakasa came to Johannesburg to join Drum and among his suitcases — to the other reporters' surprise — was a tennis racquet. "In some ways he was extremely uncomfortable at Drum, but he loved words and founded a literary magazine called The Classic which was named after a shebeen."

In 1964 Nakasa won a Nieman Fellowship but was refused a passport by the South African government. To take up the fellowship at Harvard university he had to take an exit permit and never return.

After one year at Harvard he settled in New York, but in 1965 "he jumped from a tall building," Thloloe said. "I will never forgive the apartheid regime for destroying such beautiful brains. He was a victim of censorship and insanity."

Thloloe said the South African Nieman fellows found Nakasa's remains in an unmarked grave in New York City. They decided, with the Print Media Association and the SA National Editors' Forum, to create a "living monument" to Nakasa. Hence the award which recognises brave journalism.

In giving the inaugural award to Jon Qwelane on Media Freedom Day last year Thloloe said: "For Jon there are no sacred cows. He has infuriated this country's president and hundreds of people who write to magazines and newspapers. He's infuriated editors and the people who listen to him on the radio. And this is because of his courage, integrity and love of truth."

Accepting the award Qwelane said: "For more than a decade now on this day journalists have gathered to look at the intricate problems facing our craft. Today there is one pressing issue we should all look at. We know we are not entirely honest in our endeavours. Standards have gone down and only we can correct that. We need a seminar on honesty in the media."

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