

# WORLD JOURNALISM CONFERENCE COMES TO AFRICA



By Erik Hersman

**A**lfred Sirleaf is an analog blogger. He runs the “Daily News”, a news hut by the side of a major road in the middle of Monrovia. He started it a number of years ago, stating that he wanted to get news into the hands of those who couldn’t afford newspapers, in the language that they could understand.

Sirleaf serves as a reminder that simple is often better, just because it works. The lack of electricity never throws him off. The lack of funding means he’s creative in unusual ways; he recruits people from around the city and country to report news to him. He uses his cellphone as the major point of connection between him and the 10 000 (he says) that read his blackboard daily.

Not all Liberians who read his news are literate, so he makes use of symbols. Whether it’s a UN or military helmet, a



## THE BLACKBOARD BLOGGER

poster of a soccer player or a bottle of coloured water to denote gas prices, he is determined to get the message out in any way that he can.

Advertising works here too. It’s \$5 to be on the bottom level, \$10 to be on the sideboard and \$25 on the main section.

He doesn’t get a lot of advertising, but he manages to scrape by.

His plans for the future include decentralising his work by opening up identical locations in other parts of Monrovia, and in a few of the larger cities around the country.



**T**he School of Journalism and Media Studies (JMS) at Rhodes University in South Africa will host the 2nd World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC 2) in 2010 from 5 to 7 July.

**For international journalism educators**

**this is** a chance to take forward the momentum of WJEC 1 Singapore 2007, and to network with African colleagues. **For African and South African journalism educators this is** an opportunity to network on a pan-African scale, and to gain from – and contribute to – global journalism education discussions.

**For all participants, the conference will be a time to:** network with the world’s biggest annual gathering of African journalists (at the parallel Highway Africa conference), and give close-range attention to global issues (from finance to football) relevant to journalism education worldwide. Alongside the second WJEC are three Africa-based events:

- The Fifa matches in nearby Port Elizabeth. Grahamstown itself will have spectator parks.
- The National Arts Festival, which showcases a full range of cultural activity and entertainment. Participants could arrive a day or two earlier to absorb some of this experience (see [www.nafest.co.za/](http://www.nafest.co.za/)).
- The Highway Africa conference, celebrating its 14th year in 2010, and drawing hundreds of working journalists from more than 40 of Africa’s 54 countries (see [www.highwayafrica.com](http://www.highwayafrica.com)).

The 2nd WJEC is supported by Unesco, the World Association of Newspapers and the World Editors Forum.

The conference will offer opportunities to present peer-reviewed research papers on journalism education issues. There will be joint sessions with Highway Africa, master classes in new media technologies, and debates and exhibitions.

The first-ever global gathering of journalism educators took place in Singapore in July 2007. WJEC 1 was the first comprehensive international attempt to compare a vast range of different national experiences, and to find consensus on common principles.

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WJEC: <http://wjec.ou.edu/congress.html>.

## AN EDITOR’S WORST NIGHTMARE

By Brett Lock

**W**ell, it must be a magazine editor’s worst nightmare... The latest issue of Q magazine dropped through my door today. It had a full page front cover of Michael Jackson. Well, at first I didn’t give it a second glance because Jackson’s picture has been everywhere. But then it occurred to me that it was impossible that the magazine could have been printed and posted so quickly. Then the horrible truth dawned on me as I ripped open the plastic cover ...

The cover story is billed as “Michael Jackson Unmasked”.

On the masthead page, the editorial declares in large type: “It’s the month of Jacko”. Well, I suppose he wasn’t wrong. Indeed, Editor Paul Rees peers into his crystal ball and editorialises thus:

“At the time of going to press, the self-styled king of pop was due to play the first shows of his proposed 50-night stand at London’s O2 arena within a matter of days. But, as Q has learned in the process of putting this issue together, there are no certainties in Michael Jackson’s world – besides the one that suggests that anything that can go madly, will go madly.”

This is the prelude to a 16-page full colour extravaganza on Michael Jackson billed as “The tale of the biggest comeback in history!”

“On 13 July 2009 Michael Jackson is set to play the first of 50 dates at London’s O2 Arena. It is the most ambitious comeback in the history of popular music, but several questions still hang in the air. Will he turn up? Will he sing more than a few lines? Can Michael Jackson really survive 50 shows or will his body and mind, both seemingly so fragile, disintegrate under the pressure of it all?”

And then the article goes on to talk about the man “gambling his reputation on Jackson turning up for the shows”. Ouch!

As a footnote, the writing on the magazine spine says:



“Michael Jackson | The Enemy | The Dead Weather | Spinal Tap | The Horrors | Dead Rock Stars”

Alas, the “dead rock stars” story has a CSI-style forensic investigator re-examining famous rock star deaths, including Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Buckley and Bob Marley. It couldn’t be more ghoulish following the 16-page Jackson extravaganza.

Oh, and it’s dated August 2009. So now bizarrely, Michael Jackson must be the first rock star to have a front page story in a music paper of record announcing a new concert series dated a month after his death.