

Free Press Unlimited's list of contested points and De Correspondent's response

September 19, 2017

Three days after we sent the article [“How Free Press Unlimited silenced its own journalists”](#) to Free Press Unlimited – and two days after we published it – FPU sent us a list containing 31 points they take issue with in the article. We were very happy to receive that list. It's enabled us to clarify a few points and add extra context to others. We've also made three key changes to the article.

These changes concern 1) the administrative details of the relationship between Free Press Unlimited and Radio Tamazuj (point 9), 2) our original statement that the new editor in chief had resigned, when he was in fact an interim editor in chief (point 30), and 3) our original claim that Tamazuj's staff was forbidden to report on its personnel changes (point 31).

We're publishing Free Press Unlimited's full list here, with our response to each point. The changes we made to our article on September 19, 2017 (original Dutch version updated September 15 at 6pm) are in **red**. **FPU's list confirms that our article's conclusions remain fully intact.**

Article text	Free Press Unlimited's response	De Correspondent's explanation
1. “The Dutch aid organization Free Press Unlimited...”	Free Press Unlimited is not an aid organization but a media development organization.	At De Correspondent, we use the phrase “aid organization” in the broadest sense of the term, to enhance readability. We often refer to both economic and humanitarian assistance as “aid”; we often refer to the organizations that carry out this work as “aid organizations” or “NGOs.” In that vein, we don't refer to UNICEF as a “child development assistance agency” or the Dutch Council for Refugees as a “refugee assistance foundation.”
2. “None of Radio Tamazuj's staff can log in on that December morning. Turns	The then editor-in-chief Van Oudenaren denied his colleagues access to mail-	In speaking with us – independently – two of the former editor in chief's

out the Dutch aid organization Free Press Unlimited, which founded Radio Tamazuj and provides its funding, has revoked the journalists' access.”

and social media accounts by changing the passwords. The director of Radio Tamazuj requested Free Press Unlimited to change the password to the website. The new password was then immediately sent to the director and web editor of Radio Tamazuj.

colleagues *deny* that Van Oudenaren locked them out of the station's email and social media accounts. Several email exchanges between Tamazuj's editors during this period provide evidence that Van Oudenaren's colleagues had access to their email as usual.

Furthermore, email exchanges between the editor in chief and Tamazuj's director reveal that the director was surprised that the editor in chief did not have access to the website.

It is unclear how this can be reconciled with FPU's claim that the station's director took the initiative to change the website's password.

Furthermore, FPU confirmed in an earlier response that FPU itself took over the passwords and changed them. [Earlier this week, FPU wrote on its website:](#)

“Because the team feared that he would do the same with the website [as with the Twitter account –MV], we have taken over the passwords and other security measures of the website, changed them and immediately gave them back to the director of Radio Tamazuj.”

Our sources also confirm that website access was quickly restored to a junior web editor.

But that has no bearing on

		<p>the fact that other editors were unable to log in to the website for days, as email exchanges confirm.</p>
<p>3. “Free Press Unlimited – an organization fighting to achieve global freedom of the press – is censoring its own radio station.”</p>	<p>No censorship has taken place, now or in the past; we have never removed articles from the website or told the editors what they could or couldn’t write. The articles of which we questioned the journalistic quality have always remained on the website and are still available today (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)</p>	<p>We define censorship as the use of authority to suppress information or to restrict expression. In our article, we demonstrate that this was indeed the case.</p> <p>Nowhere do we write that Free Press Unlimited had removed articles from the Tamazuj website.</p> <p>We do have incontrovertible evidence that the FPU team leader, FPU director Leon Willems, and FPU chair Joop Daalmeijer pressured the station’s staff to alter their reporting choices.</p> <p>Willems writes to Tamazuj’s staff: “... we urge you to stop publishing additional stories along the same line which are disputed. That includes new stories that harm persons and organisations who have been the subject of these already published stories.”</p> <p>Daalmeijer writes: “Try not to bite the hand of the person who is feeding you. Try not to offend a donor...”</p> <p>This pressure was subsequently turned into action, by denying Tamazuj’s editor in chief and other editors access to the station’s website.</p>
<p>4. “...the radio station had to cross borders both literal and figurative.”</p>	<p>Radio Tamazuj started as a program on Radio Dabanga (a radio station focused on</p>	<p>In a passage from the approved initial project proposal, it says that</p>

	<p>Sudan). Originally, there were no plans to turn it into its own radio station.</p>	<p>Tamazuj (then going by the working title of Radio Referendum) is being founded as a radio project with the goal of maturing into an independent media organization:</p> <p>“In case of a positive change towards freedom of the press, the ownership of the infrastructure will go to an independent media organization most probably to be established with support of Press Now.”</p>
<p>5. “It was a humble start: in the early years, around 2010, the station ran on a radio signal generated by wires strung between the trees.”</p>	<p>Radio Tamazuj was started in 2011.</p>	<p>Tamazuj’s predecessor, Radio Referendum, was founded in 2010. That’s why we’ve used this loose indication of time.</p>
<p>6. “Journalists took cassette recorders into the field.”</p>	<p>Radio Tamazuj has always used digital recorders.</p>	<p>We were confusing Tamazuj with a predecessor that also broadcast in the Nuba mountains. The predecessor did use cassette recorders, such as EO Nagras. We’ve removed this sentence from the article.</p>
<p>7. “With help from the Dutch development aid organization... the tiny station evolved into a news broadcaster....”</p>	<p>The radio program on Radio Dabanga evolved into a radio station with its own frequency.</p>	<p>We’ve changed “tiny station” to “project.”</p>
<p>8. “The relationship between Free Press Unlimited and Radio Tamazuj is simple: FPU is responsible for funding, Tamazuj’s editor in chief and his staff for content.”</p>	<p>Free Press Unlimited is currently the publisher of Radio Tamazuj. The programs and articles are produced under the responsibility of Free Press Unlimited, the independence of the editors is ensured through an editorial charter. This is a common model which is comparable to the</p>	<p>Thank you for this elaboration. We are aware of the nature of the relationship. We believe that the description in our article is still correct, if somewhat condensed for the sake of readability.</p>

	relationship between a publisher and editors in media companies. Free Press Unlimited currently also takes care of the organizational and financial management of Radio Tamazuj. After all, a media organization consists of more than just an editor and a funder.	
9. "That division is also laid down in FPU's code of conduct: "Free Press Unlimited works with independent (media) partners who are able to execute their activities freely and independently and whose aim is to search for the truth and provide informative services to the general public."	Radio Tamazuj is not an independent partner of Free Press Unlimited. It is a project team within the organization that will become independent in the future. As ensured in the editorial charter, the editors perform their duties freely and independently.	We've removed this sentence and replaced it with the following one: "As laid down in the project's editorial charter, Radio Tamazuj performs its editorial activities freely and independently."
10. "Radio Tamazuj decides – since no one else is doing it – to start broadcasting in Juba itself."	At the time mentioned Radio Tamazuj was already broadcasting nationally, so it was not a new decision to start doing this. Technically the programs are not broadcasted from Juba but through short-wave frequencies from locations outside of South Sudan.	This addition does not contradict our article. Tamazuj did indeed already broadcast nationally, but its reporting did not specifically target an audience in Juba. The station decided to start targeting this audience during the 2013 crisis.
11. "One of those articles calls into question an article Eye Radio had published. (Eye Radio subsequently retracted that piece.)"	This concerns two articles: in the first article by Radio Tamazuj doubts are cast over an article by Eye Radio. After this article had been retracted by Eye News, the motives of retraction are questioned in a second article by Radio Tamazuj. In that same article Radio Tamazuj mentions that the now retracted Eye Radio article might actually contain some truth after all.	This is correct, and we link to both of those articles in the text.

12. “The articles are the starting point for Free Press Unlimited’s interference in Radio Tamazuj’s editorial decisions – an interference that will steadily grow.”

Free Press Unlimited does not and has not interfered in editorial decisions. As a publisher, Free Press Unlimited has taken their responsibility to uphold good journalistic principles and questioned the editors about the articles. Free Press Unlimited did this after they received complaints about the journalistic quality of the reporting.

Our article shows that there was in fact interference in Radio Tamazuj’s editorial choices, which goes beyond questioning the staff about the quality of their work. Our article also shows that FPU was motivated by a desire to avoid putting its relationships with existing donors under additional pressure.

First, neither the FPU team leader nor the grant manager doubted the quality of the content, as the notes from the June 29 meeting show: “While the content of the article may be valid, and likely is as [the FPU team leader and grant manager] agree, the timing of this article is very unfortunate...”

Second, the complaints to which FPU refers in its response came from a donor, and these complaints do not address the articles’ journalistic quality, but rather the negative message about this donor, as an email from the team leader to the editor in chief reveals: “Today evening I received an e-mail from a concerned donor who felt that Tamazuj is bashing Internews, warning me this can lead to a tarnished reputation for us all also in the eyes of other donors.”

Third, the articles were under discussion because there was a concern this critical reporting would subject an already difficult relationship with this donor to further pressure. This is evidenced

		<p>in both the team leader’s email message to the editor in chief and the meeting notes.</p> <p>Team leader’s email message: “If their observation is right, this is potentially a big threat to our existence.”</p> <p>Meeting notes: “... the timing of this article is very unfortunate for a number of reasons, including credibility of Radio Tamazuj as professional media house and the preservation of donor relations, especially those with whom FPU is currently trying to make deals for minimizing the damage incurred by the iStream termination.”</p>
13. “Free Press Unlimited is one of the organizations that receives a subgrant, to the tune of \$1.5 million.”	It concerns a subgrant of \$1.4 million for a period of 3 years and 2 months. This grant is not solely meant for Radio Tamazuj but also to further the exchange of content between local media in South Sudan.	The amount is indeed \$1,434,871. We’ve added “roughly” in front of “\$1.5 million” in our text.
14. “\$85,338 of this was spent on staffing for Radio Tamazuj.”	In total around \$169,000 has been spent on staffing at Radio Tamazuj over the whole project period.	\$85,338 was the amount available to pay Radio Tamazuj’s local journalists over the entire project period. We did not include other staffing costs. This was an error, and we’ve corrected it to use the right figure.
15. “But when FPU turns in its first i-STREAM audit report in September 2015”	The first audit report was submitted in December 2015.	We have an email from October 21, 2015 in which Internews responds to the audit report FPU has submitted. That message indicates that the report was, in fact, submitted in

		<p>September.</p> <p>According to the subgrant contract between Internews and FPU, which is in De Correspondent's possession, the deadline for the first audit report was September 30, 2015.</p> <p>A new version of the audit report may have been submitted in December 2015, but that was <i>after</i> Internews voiced concerns about an earlier version of the report.</p>
<p>16. "Email exchanges between Internews and Free Press Unlimited reveal that FPU's books didn't comply with American accounting standards."</p>	<p>Free Press Unlimited's books comply with all Dutch, European and American accounting guidelines and standards. During its entire existence, Free Press Unlimited has received unqualified audit reports for all project and organizational audits. In this particular case a small amount (less than 2% of the total) has been withdrawn from reported expenses because at the time of the audit not all underlying documents were available. This was also due to the unavailability of the field office in Juba caused by renewed unrest.</p>	<p>In its October 21, 2015 email, Internews writes to FPU about its audit report: "... <i>the audit was not performed in accordance with US GAAP and US GAS, rather Dutch GAAP.</i>" A few months later, Internews canceled FPU's funding.</p> <p>The context here is the i-STREAM project. By using the word "books" in our text, we may have given the impression that the concerns apply to FPU across the board. We've therefore added "for this project" to our text.</p>
<p>17. "FPU, working to salvage what it can, negotiates with Internews to keep paying the subgrant through August."</p>	<p>In the conversation about ending the funding per the 17th of June it was agreed that costs that could not be stopped per that date, such as the salaries of local staff hired specifically for this project, could be paid until the end of July.</p>	<p>This was a translation error. Our original article reads "tot augustus" (until August), which is the same thing as "until the end of July." The original article is thus correct. We've corrected the English translation to say "through the end of July."</p>
<p>18. "Editor in chief Van</p>	<p>The e-mail was sent on a</p>	<p>Van Oudenaren told us that</p>

<p>Oudenaren decides not to respond to the email.“</p>	<p>Thursday evening and Van Oudenaren responded to it on Monday, June 27.</p>	<p>he did not respond to this email, and the documents in our possession confirm this.</p> <p>FPU may be referring to another email Van Oudenaren sent on Monday, June 27: he <i>did</i> respond to an email from the FPU team leader in which she asked for a meeting with Tamazuj’s entire staff on “this whole iStream issue.” Van Oudenaren responds to that email by saying that a meeting with the whole staff doesn’t seem appropriate to him: “There is nothing the newsroom personnel can do about the issue, so it is not our concern to worry about it. [...] Ebb and flow of funding has been normal in this project for years.”</p> <p>Of course, it’s hard to prove that an email <i>hasn’t</i> been sent. If FPU can show us Van Oudenaren’s reply to this message, we will change our article text to reflect that.</p>
<p>19. “A few days later, on June 29, two representatives from FPU fly to East Africa to speak with Van Oudenaren.”</p>	<p>The purpose of this field visit to Juba was not solely to talk with Van Oudenaren but was planned before. The conversation with Van Oudenaren about Radio Tamazuj in Nairobi took place on our way to South Sudan.</p>	<p>Thank you for this addition. This does not contradict our article in any way.</p>
<p>20. “[FPU’s team leaders] explain they have had constructive talks with the Internews team dealing with the implementation of the termination”</p>	<p>The team leader and the grant manager.</p>	<p>We’ve changed this in our article.</p>
<p>21. “Van Oudenaren admits that his staff felt attacked,</p>	<p>The Correspondent correctly quotes from the</p>	<p>We are familiar with the content of these meeting</p>

<p>and they were angry. But that wasn't the motivation for the articles, he says."</p>	<p>meeting notes, however, this quote is followed later by : During the conversation Van Oudenaren stated he would do anything to destroy Internews and Eye Radio. ("He is out to get them, and would like to see these operations destroyed. This is what is needed and he will do what he can to achieve it") – an aim one can hardly justify as journalistic. The Correspondent has ignored this part of the meeting notes.</p>	<p>notes.</p> <p>Two sources who were present during that conversation claim that Van Oudenaren was misquoted here. For that reason, they registered their disagreement with this passage in the meeting notes by email on July 5, 2016. This email message is in De Correspondent's possession.</p> <p>What Van Oudenaren did say, according to these sources, is that he thought it was important to keep subjecting Internews and Eye Radio to critical reporting, because their reporting was feeding the conflict in South Sudan – an observation FPU itself made in a letter from mid-2014: "The Juba-based FM station Eye Radio, supported by Internews, was on 7 March 2014 officially warned that the station would be suspended if any opposition voice was allowed on air. Based on monitoring Eye Radio, it can be concluded that it has chosen to follow the government narrative on the situation in South Sudan: ministers are provided large timeslots for government propaganda rhetoric, while independent and opposition sources are neglected."</p>
<p>22. "Willems asks Tamazuj's staff to set up a complaints mechanism "to increase editorial transparency."</p>	<p>Willems repeats the request to set up a complaints mechanism. This request had been made much earlier, specifically to ensure that complaints</p>	<p>That this request had also been made earlier does not contradict our article.</p> <p>However, FPU's claim that complaints could not be</p>

	could be handled directly by Radio Tamazuj instead of through Free Press Unlimited, as happened then. Nothing was done with the earlier request.	handled directly by Radio Tamazuj is incorrect. There is a public contact form on the station's website.
23. "Complaints in themselves are not evidence of any kind of wrongdoing, and none of the emails that you shared constitute any evidence of misreporting."	The forwarded e-mails with complaints at least contain the evidence that there was no chance of rebuttal for the involved parties. A repeatedly made journalistic error which we brought to the attention of the editor-in-chief multiple times in our role as publisher.	<p>In fact, the forwarded emails containing complaints about the Internews items demonstrate precisely that there was a chance of rebuttal. These are emails from the Radio Tamazuj account addressed to Forcier Consulting (an Internews partner) containing questions and corrections.</p> <p>What's more, three of the six contested articles contain quotes that show that Radio Tamazuj did provide those concerned with the right to reply.</p> <p>The two emails from other parties are indeed complaints, but nonetheless do not provide evidence that the problem is bad journalism. One of those two articles also incorporates the complainant's response.</p> <p>In their editorial review, Tamazuj's journalists say that there was surely room for minor improvement in those articles, but they found no reporting errors that would justify retractions or corrections.</p> <p>And to this day, the articles, which have consistently remained online, have not been amended.</p>
24. "Three months later, the station's staff sends a	In the editorial review of 2017 (under guidance of	All the station's senior editors endorsed the October

<p>130-page report to Free Press Unlimited’s management, which explains in minute detail how the six articles came to be and how they led to the disagreement with FPU. The main conclusion? ‘There is no evidence to substantiate allegations that there were serious ethical breaches on the part of any journalist or journalists at Radio Tamazuj, nor any serious inaccuracies.’”</p>	<p>external expert Michael Alexander) it turned out that only a small fraction of the editors read and agreed with this conclusion.</p>	<p>2016 editorial review.</p> <p>That only a small fraction of the editors present in July 2017 read and agreed with this conclusion is logical: many of the editors participating in the July 2017 review were either not yet working at the station in December 2016 or were not yet senior editors.</p>
<p>25. “We never, ever, in five and a half years failed to broadcast. Except that one day. Everybody went home.”</p>	<p>There have been daily broadcasts every day, including that day.</p>	<p>The station’s staff did not produce a new episode that day, but broadcast an old show instead.</p> <p>The quote may give the impression that the station was off the air. We’ve therefore added this sentence: “Radio Tamazuj aired an old show that day.”</p>
<p>26. “Two days later, Tamazuj’s staff publish parts of their editorial review on Twitter.”</p>	<p>It was Daniel van Oudenaren who posted parts of the editorial review on Twitter, not the editors. The editors did not have access to the account. Van Oudenaren used the Radio Tamazuj Twitter account to post about pending internal affairs and internal documents.</p>	<p>We have three sources who were directly involved who claim that Van Oudenaren was acting on behalf of the entire staff. They say it was a mutual decision by the editorial council (which contains Tamazuj’s most senior editors) to Tweet about the review. It seems reasonable that an outlet’s editor in chief would be the person with access to its Twitter account.</p>
<p>27. “When they arrive at work the next morning, no one can log in... It takes seven days before full website access is returned to all the station’s editors.”</p>	<p>As mentioned under 2: the editors could not log into the social media accounts of Radio Tamazuj because Van Oudenaren did not or barely respond to the request to hand over the</p>	<p>The ability to log in being referred to here concerns the station’s website, not its social media accounts. Once again: multiple editors at that time <i>deny</i> that Van Oudenaren locked them out</p>

	<p>login information. By doing so, he directly denied his colleagues access to Twitter, Facebook, Soundcloud, the newsletter and the general e-mail account which receives questions from the audience. The final passwords were only handed back after the end of his contract period. By changing the password for the website, at the request of the radio director, editors could continue to work and publish on the website. Radio programs continued to be produced as well.</p>	<p>of the station’s social media accounts.</p> <p>Regarding the website’s passwords: an email exchange between the editor in chief and the station’s director reveals that the director was surprised the editor in chief could not log in. This is incompatible with FPU’s claim that the director requested the passwords be changed.</p> <p>What’s more, in an earlier response to us and on its website FPU <i>confirmed</i> that it had changed the passwords itself: “Because the team feared that he would do the same with the website, we have taken over the passwords and other security measures of the website, changed them and immediately gave them back to the director of Radio Tamazuj.”</p> <p>Yes, articles could be published on the website, but not in the usual way: only via the station’s director and a junior web editor, who had already been given access. We have several emails from different editors who had to send their articles to junior colleagues because they could not publish them themselves.</p>
<p>28. “The organization explains why as follows: editor in chief Van Oudenaren supposedly used Tamazuj’s social media accounts to vent his personal displeasure, and</p>	<p>An e-mail sent on December 5 2016 by the director of Radio Tamazuj clearly shows Van Oudenaren took over the social media accounts. In this e-mail the director</p>	<p>There are now another <i>two</i> former senior editors – the managing editor and the news editor – who affirm that Van Oudenaren did <i>not</i> “take over” the social media accounts, but that it was a</p>

<p>FPU was afraid “he would do the same with the website. Van Oudenaren denies this. His version of events is confirmed by another editor who worked there at the time.”</p>	<p>clearly states he wants the passwords and other crucial information from Van Oudenaren: “We will demand the information we require. This will include passwords, details of editors abroad and the stringers which he manages.”</p>	<p>mutual decision to Tweet about the station’s disagreement with FPU.</p> <p>The email of December 5 is not in our possession. But email exchanges we do have show that the editors’ access to the website had been revoked before that date, on December 2. We thus fail to see how an email sent on December 5 can disprove that evidence.</p>
<p>29. “What came next was a chaotic period for Tamazuj’s staff. ‘We only did the routine news that could be done by any other media house,’ says one of the editors, who asked to remain anonymous to protect his job. ‘But the investigative stories, the conflict reporting: they killed it.’”</p>	<p>Radio Tamazuj has and still does report about the war on a daily basis. The network of local reporters is intact, active and of the same size as it was before. The editors have developed several new formats for the radio. The government of South Sudan is so displeased about the reporting by Radio Tamazuj that they have demanded local internet providers block its website mid July 2017.</p>	<p>This quote concerns the period directly after editor in chief Van Oudenaren’s departure. That’s why the quote is in the past tense.</p> <p>We can imagine this might give the impression that Radio Tamazuj still isn’t reporting on the war to this day. To avoid this interpretation, we’ve added “about the period directly after Van Oudenaren’s departure” to our text.</p>
<p>30. “The newly appointed editor in chief also resigned,”</p>	<p>This editor-in-chief was hired on a temporary basis for a period of three months because Free Press Unlimited wanted to appoint a new editor-in-chief in mutual agreement with the editors. He did not resign, as The Correspondent suggests. After the end of the contract period he remained involved with Radio Tamazuj for a period, even after starting a new job in Sierra Leone.</p>	<p>We were too quick to use the term “resigned” here. We’ve removed this sentence from our article.</p>
<p>31. “Tamazuj’s staff was forbidden to report on it.”</p>	<p>The editors themselves decide what to publish.</p>	<p>Two independent sources told us this. Based on FPU’s</p>

		<p>response, we tried to confirm this with additional sources. We were unable to do so, and thus decided to remove this sentence from our article.</p>
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