Safrea rejects calls for 'volunteer' and low-paid journalists

Issued by [Safrea](#)   28 Oct 2016

Safrea rejects a recent call by Mail & Guardian Africa for 'volunteers' to submit news and opinion content. The body, which represents freelance media professionals in southern Africa, sees the call as part of a worrying trend of devaluing media talent in the local news industry.

safrea
Southern African Freelancers' Association

"Journalism requires an incredible amount of skill and experience. For a prestigious media organisation like Mail & Guardian to call these workers 'volunteers' is degrading," says Safrea Chair Laura Rawden.

"Sadly, this is not the first instance of such behaviour. Mail & Guardian is just the latest news body attempting to recruit media professionals for unpaid or low-paid work, and it cannot be accepted," she says.

Repeated attempts by Safrea to contact M&G Africa regarding the call were unsuccessful. In the advert, published online on 17 October 2016, M&G states:

> *"We're on the lookout for volunteer writers who have a nose for news and excellent writing skills. Whether it's a news article you'd like to submit or an opinion piece, either would be welcome."Don't get us wrong – it's not easy. We have high standards. This game is easy to play, but hard to master. But if you're funny or clever or smart, and willing to work, we'll give you the platform and a global audience."*

By calling for volunteers with excellent writing skills and strong work ethic, M&G Africa is crossing a line that could have consequences for freelance media professionals.

"By setting the bar for talented journalists at volunteer level, M&G is dangerously close to saying that it does not respect the skills of professionals in the industry," says Rawden.

The M&G call is part of a worrying pattern of rates trends Safrea has seen in South Africa's media industry, particularly with regards to journalism and photography.

Over the past few months, Safrea members have reported other examples of influential media houses lowering their freelance rates considerably.

Caxton Magazines has reportedly upped the required word count on freelance submissions, without increasing its standard rates.

The move is understood as an effort to increase Caxton's online presence, for which it does not have adequate budget. Freelancers who can't afford to work for the lower rates are allegedly being dropped from Caxton's contributor list.

Times Media, in an email statement to its contributing photographers, recently announced a new lower rate for freelance contributions. These rates have been reported by freelancers to not match even the minimum income requirements of a media professional.

Safrea will be issuing its first annual *SA Freelance Industry and Rates Report* in December 2016. The report will highlight official statistics about freelancers in South Africa, and trends in fees being paid for several freelance specialities.

Safrea hopes this report will contribute to the creation of a stronger freelance industry and establish standards and practices that could improve the working conditions for freelancers throughout the country.

About Safrea
Safrea is the Southern African Freelancers' Association. We advocate for and support freelance workers in the communications fields. We also provide resources, tools, training and networking to strengthen freelance careers.

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Safrea is the Southern African Freelancers Association. We provide advocacy, support and resources to freelancers in the media and communications industry, and provide tools, training and networking to freelance professionals.

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