Together in Tunis

TRADE UNION members from around the world have now a “Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists” and are supporting a campaign for a UN Convention on the Protection of Journalists and Media Professional.

Those are just two of the results of the 30th World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists which took place in Tunis in June.

London Freelance Branch was present as well, as I was elected to take part in this meeting, joining the official NUJ delegation. This included General Secretary Seamus Dooley, President and Vice president Sian Jones and Pierre Vicary, Jim Boumelha and Ronan Brady.

We were among the 245 delegates representing 187 unions and associations across the globe, talking about the future of journalism in the digital age.

I heard about how to attract to unions young journalists working in digital jobs, how to help them defend themselves against unscrupulous employers, how to fix gender inequality in media and update uncompromising ethics to meet the new-tech challenges.

The Congress was the first to be held in Africa and in a Muslim country. Each document was written in three languages (French, English and Spanish) and real-time translations were provided in Arabic as well. The Brussels-based IFJ, founded in Paris in 1926, has never been so global.

Tunisia was the first democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring revolutions. The President of the Tunisian Republic Beji Caid Essebsi visited the Congress to talk about free speech. The newly-elected IFJ president is African as well: Youness M’Jahed, from Morocco, spent years in jail because of his political views. On the occasion of the IFJ Congress, the African unions were all together and represented by the FAJ president Sadiq Ibrahim.

Together with thousands of colleagues, we marched along the streets of Tunis to the headquarters of the Tunisian union SNJT (syndicat national des journalistes tunisiens) to call for an end to impunity for crimes against journalists: the appalling number of 95 colleagues were killed last year. W4e remembered freelance Lyra McKee as well – see the May Freelance. The locals supported us from balconies and terraces – it was such an empowering moment, even if more needs to be done in Tunisia about security, gender equality and LGBT rights.

The NUJ has a respected position and it is on the frontline on topics such as the gender pay gap and equal pay. We also presented a motion proposing better collaboration with the UNI Global Union.