



WFSJ

World Federation of Science Journalists

World Federation of Science Journalists

2023 Annual Report

November 20th, 2024



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Word from the WFSJ President



Overall, 2023 was a year of great success, combined with some deep-seated concerns around governance and transparency which resulted in an upheaval at the Federation and a reset of relations with Member Associations.

The year started with final preparations for the World Conference of Science Journalists in Colombia. In March, Science journalists from around the world gathered in the dramatic botanical gardens of Medellin to discuss science journalism under a canopy of trees as iguana wandered by – a truly memorable experience!

During the conference, member associations held a meeting to address concerns about transparency and governance at the Federation that had been brewing for several years. However, the meeting failed to resolve these differences and left many questions unanswered. The then Board responded by launching a new election for Board members, which had been long overdue, partly due to delays caused by the pandemic.

I was honoured to be among six new Board members who were finally selected in August. Yet it wasn't until December that the Board met to confirm its new Officers, with former Treasurer Harry Surjadi appointed as President, Ximena Serrano Gil as Vice-President, Lesley Evans Ogden as Treasurer and myself as Board Secretary.

A note about 2024

While this report focuses on the 2023 activities of the Federation, I would also like to briefly address the developments of 2024.

In the months that followed the December 2023 Board meeting, the new Board members became increasingly alarmed as the Federation Office and leadership refused to disclose any financial reports to the elected Treasurer, while requests for a Board meeting were met with continual delays, excuses and cancellations. This all came to a head in June 2024, when the Board finally took matters into its own hands and, acting within the procedures of our by-laws, bypassed the office to convene a Board meeting, where it passed a vote of no-confidence in the President and Vice-President.

At this point, I took the reins as President in order to help guide the Board as it sought to restore governance and transparency. The Board now meets at least once per month, and has published the 2023 finances on the website and presented them to members. The membership have been very supportive of the actions of the Board – and the huge rise in fee payments we have seen from Member Associations following the management change is testament to that. I believe the Federation is now operating in a fully transparent way, and well-placed for growth.

Ben Deighton

2023 Highlights

Finally! A Successful World Conference of Science Journalists.

After a four-year hiatus, the World Federation of Science Journalists held its World Conference from 27th to 31st March, 2023, in Medellín (Colombia).



WCSJ2023 was held in the spectacular Medellín Jardín Botánico.



Ximena Serrano, Director of WCSJ2023

Ximena Serrano Gil, then Vice-President of WFSJ and President of the Colombian Association of Journalism and Science Communication, led the local organization. The meeting attracted hundreds of journalists from 62 countries, including many from the global south, which was a key objective for the organizers.

The panels covered solutions journalism, reporting on the climate crisis, building relationships with local and cross-border communities, knowledge exchange, with the participation of

Indigenous people from the Amazon where scientific projects converge with ancestral knowledge, and much more. Informally, friendships were formed, acquaintances renewed, and professional networks expanded. It was organized in the beautiful open-air Botanical Garden in Medellín, Colombia¹.



Upcoming World Conferences of Science Journalists



13TH WORLD CONFERENCE OF SCIENCE JOURNALISTS
1 – 5 DECEMBER 2025, CSIR ICC, PRETORIA, TSHWANE, SOUTH AFRICA

In December 2023, WFSJ announced that the [2025 World Conference of Science Journalists](#) would be held in South Africa.

The conference's website says that WCSJ2025 is hosted by the South African Science Journalists' Association (SASJA) which is, according to the bid, «a special interest group within the Southern African Freelancers Association ».

WCSJ2025 is also hosted by the Science Diplomacy Capital for Africa, an initiative and entity of the National Department of Science and Innovation, in collaboration with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research².



London (UK) to host the 2027 World Conference of Science Journalists

WFSJ member Association of British Science Writers (ABSW) will host the World Conference of Science Journalists in 2027.

Building Global Networks for a Stronger Profession is the WCSJ2027 theme chosen by our colleagues in the United Kingdom. The event will mark the 80th anniversary of the ABSW, most probably the second oldest science journalists association in the world³.

Can the UK beat the spectacular success of the 2009 World Conference of Science Journalists in London? They should. They will have had four years to prepare!

¹ WFSJ does not have a report from the hosts of WCSJ2023.

² At the time of publication of this 2023 Annual Report – November 2024 – the World Federation of Science Journalists is still hopeful that the memorandum of understanding (MOU) that will make the South African event an official conference of the World Federation of Science Journalists will be signed.

³ The United States' National Association of Science Writers was created in 1934.



Guiding Principles for Science Journalism

“Establishing the Boundaries of Ethics in Science Journalism” is the official name of the main WFSJ project. It was funded in 2019 by the Kavli Foundation.

The project aims to assess the scope of ethics in science journalism and develop guiding principles for science journalists through community-wide consultations and a series of regional workshops.

Input from WFSJ members has been gathered via surveys and workshops to maximize engagement with the broader community of media professionals. 2023 ended with a draft of Guiding Principles to be further discussed and eventually adopted by the WFSJ.



New Leadership at the Board

2023 witnessed several changes at the Board.

By the end of the year, Harry Surjadi (Indonesia) had replaced Milica Momcilovic as President; Ximena Serrano Gil (Colombia) replaced Mandi Smallhorne as Vice-President, Lesley Evans Ogden (Canada) became Treasurer, and Ben Deighton (United Kingdom) Secretary.



Ben Deighton



Lesley Evans Ogden



Milica Momcilovic



Harry Surjadi



Chhatra Karki



Joseph Mbeng Boum

Two new members-at-large Chhatra Karki (Nepal) and Joseph Mbeng Boum (Cameroon) were elected while four Directors left the Board: Ochieng Ogodo (Kenya), Bouchra Ouatic (Canada), Nouha Belaid (Tunisia), and Federico Kukso (Argentina).

The Board ended the year with several unresolved issues: the appointed Canadian⁴ Director not being accepted by executive leadership in part because of his refusal to sign a non-disclosure

⁴ Since WFSJ is a Canadian registered charity, its bylaws state that two Canadians should be Directors: one elected within the Canadian community of science journalists; the second one is ex-officio, i.e., not elected but chosen by the Canadian associations and automatically becomes a director. Donors requested that one Director bring expertise different from journalism, in fundraising, management, human resources or law.

agreement⁵, Milica Momcilovic's status as Ex-Officio President (a position which does not exist on the WFSJ Board) contested, and an Interim Treasurer asking repeatedly but not being given access to the Federation's account. This represented a highly problematic situation under Canadian law, exposing the entire board to personal financial risk.



Louise Behan Grant

No grants were given to science journalists in 2023.



Membership Survey

During 2023, the World Federation undertook a survey of its member associations.

37 of the 72 member organizations answered the questionnaire⁶.

Since WFSJ is a 'member-driven' organization, this result raised many issues that the Board felt should be eventually addressed including better communication with member associations, updating the list of association contact persons, what to do with associations who don't pay, how to make sure the WFSJ newsletter is circulated amongst the members of associations, and what to do about members who are science communicators rather than science journalists?

WFSJ is endeavouring to move forward to address these many issues and questions in order to build trust and collaboration with its member associations, for whom the organization exists.



2023 Financial Statements

The year 2023 also set a financial precedent for WFSJ. While a World Conference of Science Journalists often delivers a surplus that provides revenue for the organization, it was not expected from WCSJ2023. By the end of the year, the costs for operating the WFSJ Office were, for the first time in the history of the Federation, considerably above the revenues needed to cover those expenses. Incoming revenues for the Federation essentially consists of membership fees, a percentage of grants that can be used to cover management/operations costs, donations, and conference surpluses⁷.

For 2023, revenues did not match expenses. At the end of the year, the balance of 'Unrestricted' funds (see [Financial Statements 2023](#) page 5) were negative by 44 486 CAD. These 'Unrestricted' funds are the total of membership fees, percentage of grants kept for management,

⁵ This 9-page NDA has since been abolished.

⁶ By the November 20th, 2024, Annual General Meeting, when this Annual Report was presented, more than 50 associations had paid their due.

⁷ This deficit is currently being reduced following the departure of the WFSJ General Manager and thanks to the work of the volunteer Board Directors and help from additional volunteers.

donations, and eventual conference surpluses which can be used to cover WFSJ Office expenses. All other funds on the WFSJ accounts are funds committed to specific activities, projects or endowed funds like the Louise Behan Grant. This deficit in the 'Unrestricted' category explains the cuts in staff made by the current administration, in 2024.