

The David Astor Journalism Awards Trust

NEWS RELEASE

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Mandela Endorses the David Astor Journalism Awards First Award Winners Start London Newspaper Attachments

Nelson Mandela has endorsed the David Astor Journalism Awards, calling them “a fitting and meaningful way” to honour the late editor of *The Observer* newspaper who vigorously championed the anti-apartheid struggle and human rights.

The awards were established in 2006 to promote, strengthen and support independent journalism in Africa. Run by a UK human rights charity, the scheme involves searching for exceptionally promising early-career newspaper journalists, investing in their long-term professional development, and building and sustaining a regional peer-support network.

Mandela’s endorsement follows the selection of the first three award winners – one each from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda – in January.

Two of the winners started temporary work placements at newspapers in London last week as part of their award package. Murithi Mutiga, News Editor at *Daily Metro* in Kenya, and Tabu Butagira, Senior Reporter at *The Daily Monitor* in Uganda, will spend three months working at *The Financial Times* and *The Times*, respectively.

The Tanzanian award winner, Valentine Marc Nkwame, Senior Reporter at *The Arusha Times*, will begin a three-month attachment at *The Sunday Times* in South Africa in September.

In his endorsement, Mandela recalls his long association with the British editor, in whose honour The David Astor Journalism Awards Trust is named, and the determined efforts he made – personally and through *The Observer* – to promote their liberation cause.

“David Astor was one of the best and most loyal friends,” the former South African President said in a written statement. “Under him, *The Observer* supported the African National Congress from the early years of apartheid, when we most needed it and when most newspapers ignored it.”

Fighting the injustice of the apartheid system was one of David Astor's greatest preoccupations throughout his 27-year editorship, which started in 1948, and continued long after his retirement from the paper in 1975.

Mandela recalled: "When I visited London in 1962, I was on the run. I met David for the first time in his house, where he gave me wonderful encouragement and good advice, and arranged for me to meet politicians."

"When I was arrested later that year and began my long imprisonment, David went to extraordinary lengths to arrange for me to receive books, which I passed on to other prisoners, who shared my gratitude," he said.

"During the years on Robben Island and in Pollsmoor I knew *The Observer* was continuing to keep myself and my colleagues in the minds of the British people while our names were banned in our own country," he said.

Paying personal tribute to the campaigning editor, who died in 2001 at the age of 89, Mandela said: "I will always remember the generosity and loyalty of David, both as a friend and supporter of our movement and South African democracy."

"The David Astor Journalism Awards Trust honours his memory in a fitting and meaningful way," he said.

Thirty-four locally nominated candidates from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda are now being considered for the second round of awards. Short-listed candidates will be interviewed in September and an independent panel of judges will choose one winner in each country from among three finalists by the end of this year.

There are no age, educational or minimum work experience requirements but candidates are expected to be at an early stage in their career and must meet certain key criteria, including solid commitment to the profession, continuing to work in Africa as their long-term career goal, and maintaining the highest ethical standards.

In addition, candidates have to show some special talent and flair for journalism, and the requisite qualities to succeed in the profession, such as independent thinking, courage, determination and drive.

Each award winner initially takes part in a three-month professional development programme tailored to their needs and interests, working with experienced outside journalists, and then becomes a career-long member of the David Astor Journalism Awards peer-support network. They also each receive a token cash award of \$500.

The David Astor Journalism Awards Trust plans to expand the scheme beyond East Africa in the future. Its overall objective is to build journalistic capacity in Africa to defend human rights, promote good governance and further socio-political development.

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