

# Lusíada



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## ICIJ - INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM OF INVESTIGATE JOURNALISTS

Will Fitzgibbon <sup>37</sup>

Thank you very much. Ana it is good to see you again and thank you for all your public contributions on these issues that helps keep the debate alive and move the needle.

It's a real pleasure to talk about both what can make us optimistic when it comes to collaboration and the future of anti-corruption efforts, but also things that might give us response, reasons to perhaps remain pessimistic, but to channel that pessimism into efforts and to double down on the work that we do that works, I think in such harmony.

As Ana has pointed out, ICIJ - International Consortium of Investigate Journalists has a very long complicated name and also, we're not very creative when it comes to project titles. We are the organisation that did Panama Papers, Paradise Papers, now Pandora Papers as well as Luanda Leaks and other projects like that.

ICIJ really has been at the forefront of international collaboration for a very long time. It is so common now to hear of the word collaboration and for people to speak of it as though it's easy to. I think it's a lesson that ICIJ has learned over the years that equally applies to members of Parliament seeking to collaborate, equally applies to academics seeking to collaborate and specially to law enforcement and members of the judiciary for example, is that it isn't easy. Something that we often forget is that somehow, because of the importance of the issues that we work on, tackling cross-bor-

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<sup>37</sup> International Consortium of Investigate Journalists. Intervenção proferida *online* em língua inglesa. (<https://doi.org/10.34628/2f1j-ze71>)

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der crime, holding the powerful to account, making sure that those kleptocrats and dictators that Ilya spoke of for example, sleep just a little less comfortably each night. That doesn't happen automatically. Each organisation, each industry has their own culture that can sometimes be in contradiction to that notion of collaboration even when we're all fighting the same fight. So far, my experience from collaborative journalism is a two step forward, one step back model.

There are always going to be frustrations and even failures when it comes to collaboration. I can't tell you the number of times I've cried into my breakfast cereal when a journalist from the country where dozens of politicians have been in the Pandora Papers hiding assets. Where two, three, four, even five journalists from that country have declined to participate in the ICIJ project, for example. It shows how structurally and industrially there are still challenges to this collaboration, despite the fact that I think that's such a demonstrated track record of the value and impact of collaboration.

ICIJ works in collaboration and really in complete complementary to the work of OCCIP who are always one of our first ports of call, when we get major projects. These projects don't happen overnight. Journalists don't wake up one morning to eleven million documents in their inbox and they don't wake up overnight to have 750 000 emails from Isabel dos Santos private army of financial advisors, but once we do get that data, ICIJ's model is to be as international as possible to share that with reporters in as many countries as possible. We don't have a top-down model, we are very decentralized, we trust and empower reporters in each country to choose their own stories and decide how that should be told. I think that's important because from my experience reporting across Africa, in particular, where ICIJ has coordinated African partnerships, measuring impact when it comes anti-corruption is culturally and graphically different. I think sometimes we in countries in Europe or the United States or my own Australia, we bring even subconsciously, sometimes unconsciously, our own metrics to anti-corruption. We say, well it's only a success if a previous case is open or it's only success if tax money or financial penalties are im-

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posed and of course that's the goal in all jurisdiction. That's the goal standard of asset recovery, of tackling financial crime, but we too have to recognize that for practical reasons, historical reasons, colonial reasons, and the legacy of all the history that is gone before us there are jurisdictions where that isn't likely to happen tomorrow. That should not discourage us. If we were only as journalists and anti-corruption fighters to focus on countries where we could beat our chest and tell donors how wonderful we are, how much impact we have then we wouldn't report on more than half the countries on the planet. I think that's valuable to keep in mind so that we continue to do that work even though sometimes the impacts seem unsatisfied.

In the Panama Papers for example. There were so many politicians who, according to Nigerian law, had broken those laws, they committed criminal actions in not disposing assets and not disclosing their ownership of London property, for example. And these people still running for President today. They're still sitting in the Senate today.

Something that I find constantly inspiring about the work that ICIJ does is how we work with these reporters who notwithstanding the fact that they receive death threats, that they earn very little money, that they are often sanctioned by prosecutors and increasingly by tax inspectors as it's very strange and nefarious, new or fairly new world in which reporters are increasingly better understanding illicit financial flows, are finding themselves more attacked by tax and financial services within their own country who are using this new interest that groups like ICIJ and OCCIP and International Transparency have given to the financial flows to target journalists accusing them of avoiding taxes. Despite all these pressures, journalists still passionate about telling their stories and they know that their president is not going to resign overnight, but they do take comfort in the fact that the next day there's a group of their citizens sitting at the taxi station in Lagos or looking through a mall in Nairobi, Kenya for example who read their stories who may be heard their stories on the radio or on the television and are still paying attention. I think that's important that we recognise that

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kind of impact as well when it comes to fighting corruption. we can't hope and assume that all countries are going to respond in the same way. I know I mentioned Luanda Leaks, which is a project that I worked for a long time when I was in Angola and it was a journey. It was an up and down journey.

One day you thought things were really going to happen, the next day you put your hand in head and said, all right nothing is going to happen and Isabel dos Santos is going to happily live forever after in Russia or Dubai or even worse, somewhere like in London, for example, where there are court systems, but like Ana pointed out, we put a lot effort in Luanda Leaks to not only telling the Luanda Leaks through the lens of kleptocracy in Angola, but how this came about. I think that is how it came about through the western enablers from the United States to Europe. I think it was only in February this year that the European Central Bank put out a finding about the Luanda Leaks, from which my main takeaway was why on the earth did it take a journalist expose to force European Central Bank to identify what was already under its notes?

Once again, as Ilya pointed out, we as journalists receive far less founding than all of these international institutions, whose employees generally exist tax-free and ride around in nice cars, whereas I go to work on my bicycle every day and it's a constant reminder to us that as with the Russian assets that we are seeing today and the response of western governments to Russian assets, the West knew the enablers knew, the UK government knew exactly about how its real estate, how its barristers, lawyers, how its accountants were being used and misused by autocrats, by oligarchs and by crooks and for many years it is only paid lip services.

Similar thing happened in response to Luanda Leaks and to be honest, similar thing happens now every time ICIJ does an investigation. European Union, European Parliament has wonderful members of it, but they are becoming, they've almost become in some ways, like an automatic ICIJ investigation response unit. ICIJ puts out an investigation there will be an European Parliament announcement saying this is wonderful, they are going to have a hearing, but as Ana pointed out, I think the question is what is next?

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In some ways, the challenge now is upon us as anti-corruption fighters and transparency advocates to say: wonderful. Thank you for paying attention. Thank you for recognizing that these issues that we told you were problems for five or ten years now are indeed problems, but let's move beyond lip service to these issues. I think that is an area where more interdisciplinary collaboration can really help, along the lines of what Ilya and Karina were talking about and where journalists really need to be forced to think more about their profession, about how they tell stories and what they do after their investigation has been published.

Journalism, like all professions sometimes can be slow to respond, slow to change, and I think more and more reporters are getting to that point of understanding that an investigation doesn't just stop at the moment of publication, but specially in this anti-corruption space, that something that we're all going to have to think long and hard about in the future. Thank you.