

Whistleblowing, artistic freedom: protecting the public interest

EMBARGOED to 6 am CET Wednesday 18 June 2025

We are a coalition of whistleblower protection, anti-corruption, transparency, human rights and public policy, and independent media organisations from Europe and around the world. We are writing in support of the concept and performance artist, ODEE in his upcoming appeal against the ruling made in favour of the company Samherji last September.

Samherji, one of Europe's largest fishing companies based in Iceland, initiated High Court proceedings against ODEE in London in May 2023, alleging copyright infringement, trademark infringement, passing off, and malicious falsehood for the unauthorised use of its brand.

The art piece at the heart of this case is ODEE's *We're Sorry* which represents the concept of corporate responsibility through a fictional apology - via a website he created and a mural at the Reykjavík Art Museum - for the alleged corruption committed by Samherji to secure fishing quotas in Namibia. The information about corruption [was revealed](#) in 2019 through Wikileaks by the whistleblower, [Jóhannes Stefansson](#), and quickly became known as the Fishrot Files.

As a result of Mr. Stefansson's disclosures, 10 suspects were charged in Namibia and 9 of these, including former Ministers of Justice and Fisheries are in jail awaiting trial. [Samherji is under criminal investigation](#) in Iceland with a trial likely to start in 2026. #Fishrot has resulted in the biggest corruption scandal in the history of both coastal countries, [Iceland](#) and [Namibia](#).

We believe that ensuring whistleblowers can disclose information about wrongdoing in the public interest is vital for democratic accountability and safeguards the public's right to know, an essential element of the right to freedom of expression.

Artistic freedom of expression, through film, theatre, painting or conceptual art, which uses satire and modern technology to critically shine a light on issues that matter as part of a wider public debate on moral and ethical choices, power and exploitation, is also essential for a healthy democracy.

Freedom of expression links public interest whistleblowers and artists – individuals who should be protected by law from the powerful who wish to stop them speaking up. Jóhannes Stefansson and ODEE continue to deserve our support.

SIGNED BY:

African Centre for Media and Information Literacy (AFRICMIL) (Nigeria)
Blueprint for Free Speech (International)
Centre for Free Expression (Canada)
Ciudadanía Inteligente (Chile)
Climate Whistleblowers (International)
Disruption Lab (Germany)
Free Press Unlimited (International)
GlobaLeaks (International)
Institute for Public Policy Research (Namibia)
Legal Human Academy (Denmark)
Oživení (Czech Republic)
Pištaljka (Serbia)
Plateforme pour la protection des lanceurs d’alerte en Afrique/Platform for the Protection of Whistleblowers in Africa
Pro Publico (EU)
Protect (United Kingdom)
Psst.org (International)
The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation (Malta)
The Signals Network (International)
Transparency International Bulgaria
Transparency International EU
Transparency International Ireland
Transparency International Italia
Whistleblower Chile
The Whistleblower House (South Africa)
Whistleblowing International Network

NOTESLinks included in Statement:

- Anatomy of a Bribe (Al Jazeera Investigations, Dec 2019)
<https://www.ajunit.com/investigation/anatomy-of-a-bribe-namibia/>
- The Fishrot Scandal – The Full Story (Protect, video interview with Johannes Stefansson, 2024) -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDwW9GVTnL8>

- Hopes that the investigation into the Samherji case will be completed this summer (Heimildin (Samherji Documents, 23 May 2025) <https://heimildin.is/grein/24636/vonast-til-ad-rannsokn-a-samherjamali-ljuki-i-sumar/>)
- A Poisonous Story Of Corruption (Reykjavík Grapevine, 23 May 2025) <https://grapevine.is/mag/feature/2025/05/23/a-poisonous-story-of-corruption/>

Information about the ODEE Appeal:

The appeal in [Samherji v. Friðriksson](#) will be heard in the High Court of Justice in London on the 18th June 2025 and will be heard by Sir. Anthony Mann. The application for permission to appeal - and the appeal itself, if granted - is listed with a time estimate of one day. The hearing is open to the public.

See ODEE's [press release](#) and his attached letter "[Introduction to We're Sorry: An Artwork Sparking Global Discussion on Corporate Responsibility and Artistic Freedom](#)," providing the background and insights of the art piece and what this case means to him.