



**JOINT PRESS STATEMENT
ON THE
COMENCEMENT OF THE WORLD PRESS
FREEDOM DAY (WPDF) 2021
COMMEMORATION ACTIVITIES**

DATE: 29TH APRIL 2021

VENUE: UHRC HEADQUARTERS
TWED PLAZA,
LUMUMBA AVENUE, NAKASERO

On behalf of the organizers of this year's World Press Freedom Day, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC).

In 1993, The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 3rd May as World Press Freedom Day. This day has been celebrated worldwide for the last 20 years or so particularly advocating and defending the fundamental principles of freedom of opinion and expression, and of the press.

In Uganda, the provisions that guarantee freedom of opinion and expression have been restated and domesticated under Article 29 of the 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda and other subsequent legislations enacted by Parliament. These instruments provide a foundation for protecting everyone's right to freedom of opinion and expression including the rights of professional journalists.

World Press Freedom Day therefore, offers all of us human rights defenders the opportunity to raise our voices to call for an environment where free speech, media freedoms and indeed media professionalism is the bedrock for democratic growth, progress and development in our country.

The Commission, has over the years worked together with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the

Uganda Journalists Association (UJA) and other key partners to hold joint commemoration activities for this day. This year, we are joined by the Uganda Journalist Union (UJU), Uganda Media Women Association (UMWA) and the Human Rights Center Uganda (HRCU). We would like, from the onset, to recognize the support of the Government of Uganda, the UN Human Rights, The German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the National Commission for UNESCO towards these commemoration activities.

We are holding these joint week-long activities under the theme: ***Information as a Public Good***; with a specific call on each one of us to renew our contribution to the global commitment to freedom of expression, press freedom, and freedom of information, while acknowledging the new economic challenges faced by the media sector; the gatekeeping role of internet companies and their need for greater transparency, as well as the strong need for Media and Information Literacy capacities to be strengthened worldwide. In a special and empathic way, we also call upon the various social media platforms and outlets to recommit to carrying out their work professionally and responsibly and to avoid sensational, hate speech and inaccurate reports.

Activities lined up for the commemoration:

Today we come together to officially launch this year's commemoration activities that have been categorized into two: the pre-event activities preceding the main event and the main event itself on

Monday 3rd May 2021. Arrangements have also been made to carry the conversation about the day beyond 3rd May using the digital media and other conventional media like the radios.

The three pre-event activities lined up include: -

1. The **Flag-off press conference** which we are holding today, Wednesday April 28th 2021, here at UHRC Head office (Twed Plaza) to launch the Commemoration week/activities.

2. **Joint Mindset Training for Field-based Journalists on Climate Change Reporting:** Two trainings aimed at building the capacities of Journalists in climate change reporting were held in Soroti on 27th April and in Gulu on 28th of April, 2021. The trainings were supported by UN Human Rights, Youth Coalition on SDGs and the UHRC Regional offices of Gulu and Soroti.

3. **A one-day Public Dialogue in Gulu** is being held today 29th April 2021 and is supported by UN OHCHR; UHRC Gulu Regional office; Media Focus on Africa; Uganda Journalist Association and Northern Uganda Media Club. The dialogue will focus on the theme: Information as a public good, but more specifically on the post-election conflict in northern Uganda.

Main Event

These events will climax into the main event in Kampala on Monday 3rd May 2021 which will be an Integrated **Cross-generational Public Dialogue**. The half-day event will provide a platform for a panel discussion by both the veteran and new journalists on their

perspectives on matters concerning the industry, professionalism and press freedom in general. The event will also have an award ceremony for eminent persons who have excelled in defense of media freedoms in the country. The Honorable Minister for Information Communications Technology (ICT) and National Guidance **Hon. Judith Nabakooba** has been invited to officiate at the function and preside over the award-winning ceremony.

The key partners supporting the main event are the UHRC, UNOHCHR, GIZ, UJA, UMWA and UJU. The event will draw about 120 participants from relevant government ministries, departments, agencies, CSOs and members of the media.

Media Campaign

This is an overlapping activity aimed at ensuring that the conversation about the day and media freedom as a whole goes beyond the main commemoration event. The partners will utilize conventional, digital and multimedia channels to popularize and advocate for the importance of this day.

Call for Action during this commemoration

The Commission and its partners therefore take this opportunity to call upon Journalists and the general public to enthusiastically take part in all these commemoration activities either physically or virtually as one of your duties in the democratization process.

It is evident that the COVID-19 global pandemic has affected every sphere of human life including the Media industry and the

Journalism profession that feed it. This has inevitably called for adoptive mechanisms to cope with the new normal brought by the pandemic through the use of internet-based applications and other forms of virtual communication methods.

In line with this year's theme therefore which calls for strengthening Media and Information Literacy capacities, I wish to inform the country that the UHRC together with the UN Human Rights have over the years championed a series of training for media professionals which we continue to do to date. Media trainings organized by the Commission and UN Human Rights has mainly emphasized principles of the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and climate change reporting held early in the week in Soroti and Gulu in commemoration of this year's World Press Freedom Day. The Commission and partners have also utilized the media as a source of information of human rights violations, and for creating awareness about human rights among members of the public. The above interventions illustrate the commitment of the Commission and its partners to the protection and promotion of media freedom in Uganda.

As we commemorate this day, the Commission and its partners wish to extend our sincere appreciation to media professionals who have ensured that they do their work in a professional, responsible and constructive way. We also extend our appreciation to all agencies of government which have ensured that cases involving abuse of media freedom and freedom of expression are conclusively investigated and the culprits are dealt with in accordance with the law.

Recommendations

Today the Commission and its partners, cognizant of the challenges currently faced by the media, wish to use this occasion to reiterate our call for the protection and promotion of media freedoms in Uganda. We also call on all stakeholders who are duty bearers to fulfill your obligations by ensuring a conducive environment in which media freedoms can thrive. We, on the other hand, call on the media practitioners to always practice professional, responsible and constructive journalism. We also call for quick and thorough investigations into the cases of violations of the rights of journalists in the course of duty, and for the perpetrators to be brought to book.

The Commission and partners note that today's commemoration is happening when a number of measures to address the recent violent clashes witnessed between some errant elements within security and journalists have been instituted. We, for instance, recognize the public apology by the army leadership for mistakes made by some of its officers while handling the media and the decision by Uganda Police Force to dismiss over 150 officers on account of indiscipline including the errant during public order management. It is our hope that the relationship between security agencies and journalists should be that of partners and not foes. Therefore, as we commemorate this year's World Press Freedom Day, we recommend the following: -

1. Government should prevail upon Media Owners to implement continuous career-development trainings and refresher courses in order to professionalize the Media industry
2. Journalists should ensure professional, responsible and constructive reporting at all times
3. The Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs and Parliament should review the current legislation with a view to empowering journalism professional bodies to discipline their members for professional misconduct or misbehavior
4. Security agencies should always investigate their errant officers who allegedly violate the rights of journalists and also discipline the culprits.

As I conclude, on behalf of the organizers of this year's commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, I would like to invite you and the general public to be part of the commemoration activities that we have organized countrywide. We believe that these events will also be a platform for networking with different stakeholders, sharing idea and a chance for us to reflect on how we can build a better media industry that serves all of us fairly.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

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Dr. Katebalirwe Amooti Wa Irumba
ACTING CHAIRPERSON, UHRC