

SPEECH DELIVERED BY GJA PRESIDENT, ALBERT DWUMFOUR ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM AT THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS CENTER ON MAY 3, 2023

Madam Chairperson, Mrs. Gifty Afenyi-Dadzie

Mawuli Segbefia, Director of Policy and Programs at the Ministry of Information representing the Minister

His Lordship Justice Dennis Dominic Adjei

The Chairman of the National Media Commission, Mr. Yaw Boadu- Ayeboafoh

Mr. Abdourahamane Diallo, UNESCO Representative in Ghana

Her Excellency, Virginia E. Palmer, US Ambassador to Ghana

His Excellency Charles Abani, UN Country Coordinator

His Excellency Irchad Razaaly, Head of EU Delegation to Ghana

Heads of Media Institutions

Editors

Media Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

I welcome you all to this year's World Press Freedom Day. I am sincerely grateful to all of you for making time to grace today's event with your presence.

As many of us here may be aware, World Press Freedom Day, which is marked May 3, every year, is a special occasion designated by UNESCO to spread awareness regarding the role media plays in our daily lives and society.

Madam Chairperson, it is worth noting that the 2023 World Press Freedom Day in Ghana is being organized solely by the GJA, with assistance from the Ghana Police Service and ADB, following the advice of our long-term partner, UNESCO, to "fish on our own." We would like to thank UNESCO for teaching us to fish. Self-dependence is very essential

The global theme for World Press Freedom Day 2023 is **“Shaping a Future of Rights: Freedom of Expression as a Driver for all other human rights.”**

Notably, this theme coincides with the 30th anniversary of both World Press Freedom Day and the Vienna Conference's Declaration and Programme of Action for Human Rights.

The theme for Ghana’s celebration which is not too distinct from the global theme is **“Freedom of Expression: A Driver for all human rights for Ghana’s Development .”**

Regarding the development of the nation, Madam Chairperson, the right to free expression is of the utmost importance, and all measures must be taken to ensure that it is not infringed upon in any way.

Madam Chairperson, the GJA, along with MFWA, GIBA, and PRINPAG, recently urged the government to amend certain provisions of the Electronic Communications Act and the Criminal Code, specifically Section 208 of the Criminal and Other Offences Act of 1960 (Act 29).

As critical stakeholders in the media industry, we cannot remain unconcerned as these laws are used to arrest citizens and journalists and prefer criminal charges over civil remedies for press and speech offenses that are merely defamatory.

The arbitrary application of these laws only serves to instill fear in the general populace.

One of our colleagues, Noah Nartey Dameh of Radio Ada was recently detained for seven days on false publication charges due to these bad laws.

As the umbrella body of journalists in this country, Madam Chairperson, we will continue to ensure that any action or law that seeks to stifle free expression fails.

Madam Chairperson, to ensure that free speech is always protected, Mr. Chairman, it is essential that journalists, who are the vanguards of free speech, receive all the support they require to carry out their duties without hindrance or compromise.

This is why, under my stewardship, the GJA has established the Journalists Support Fund (JSF). The Fund will provide legal services to journalists whose rights have been violated while performing their duties. It will also assist in providing training and seminars on safety and security to our members to improve their safety and security.

The fund will also be used to support or cushion retirees.

Since the fund's inception several months ago Madam Chairperson, it is crucial to know that so many private individuals and corporate institutions have shown interest. Some individuals and organizations have made substantial contributions to the fund.

In the coming weeks, the GJA will inaugurate the "See Something, Say Something" initiative. This initiative is distinct from that of the Ministry of National Security and aims to encourage citizens to volunteer information about individuals who plan to attack or have already attacked journalists.

We believe that this would substantially contribute to the reduction of journalistic assaults. It will also empower citizens at the local level to ensure accountability and transparency.

We are developing a proposal to be sent to the Ministry of National Security for input and support

Madam Chairperson, being proactive is essential if we are to protect the right to free expression, and I must say that the GJA has been very proactive in recent years with regard to defending this right. We also caution media outlets when necessary.

All of us are witnesses to how we managed Radio Ada vs. the Ada Traditional Council when a reporter from that station was barred from participating in activities. The GJA held a press conference to condemn the Council's actions and pointed out that they lacked the authority to prohibit a journalist.

A similar situation involving Oyerapa Radio and the Kumasi Traditional Council (Manyhia) was promptly resolved.

We are not suggesting that journalists are beyond reproach or that we are flawless. No! As stated previously, there are civil remedies available to those who believe they have been treated unjustly by the media, and they can always utilize them.

As captured in this year's World Press Freedom theme, the preservation of free expression has a trickle-down effect. When freedom of speech is jealously guarded, there will be no fear or panic because people will go about their duties without looking over their shoulders. Our democracy will prosper further if individuals can freely express their opinions.

I must state that the GJA together with its media stakeholders has initiated processes to engage the Attorney General as far as repealing the obnoxious laws which stifle

free speech. I'm talking about the Electronic Communications Act and the Criminal Code, specifically Section 208 of the Criminal and Other Offences Act of 1960 (Act 29).

Madam Chairperson, on this day, we cannot forget Ahmed Suale, four years after his gruesome murder. We continue to seek justice for him by putting pressure on the authorities concerned to up their game. Quite recently, the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice disclosed that the docket on Ahmed Suale had not reached his office considering the fact his office has prosecutorial powers.

As an association, we will continue putting pressure on the Police to conclude the investigation on the matter and submit the docket to the AG for the necessary action

Let's come together as journalists and fight hard for a more liberated society.

It is also essential to note, Madam Chairperson, that the celebration of World Press Freedom Day next year will coincide with the GJA's 75th anniversary as an organization. We intend to organize significant activities to commemorate both occasions.

As the political season approaches, I would like to exhort my media colleagues not to entertain politicians or individuals who will poison the atmosphere with intemperate and provocative remarks. Let's perform our professional roles while keeping the country's peace in mind.

Permit me to also use this occasion to warn politicians who have a propensity for abusing journalists or stifling free expression that they will not go scot-free. We are prepared to safeguard all media professionals as they perform their duties with diligence.

Finally, we commit ourselves to promoting professional standards in the media and urge all journalists and media houses to uphold the highest level of integrity and professionalism. We will not hesitate to call out any journalist or media organization that indulges in flagrant violations of professional ethics and standards. This is in view of the recognition that press freedom and indeed all other forms of freedoms go with responsibility and the duty to respect public sensibilities, human dignity and public interest.

Madam Chairperson, as I bring my remarks to a close, it is important to reiterate that the celebration of World Press Freedom Day would become an annual charade if state

institutions do not commit themselves to changing the narrative and maintaining the rights of Journalists for once.

Like I always say “Journalists' Lives Matter”.

Long live GJA

Long live World Press Freedom.

Thank you for your attention.