

FREE PRESS MUST BE PROTECTED

■ PRESS FREEDOM

World Press Freedom Day 2026 presents a defining moment for journalism globally and in Uganda. As media leaders gather in Lusaka under the theme 'Shaping a Future at Peace', the occasion calls for reflection, unity and renewed commitment to defending press freedom. For Uganda's media, it is a timely reminder that a free, independent and responsible press remains essential. Here is a message from all media houses in Uganda.

The highlight of the World Press Freedom Day 2026 will be a global conference on May 4 - 5 in Lusaka, Zambia. Under the theme *Shaping a Future at Peace*, the conference will offer a critical moment to reaffirm the critical role of a free press in society.

For the Ugandan media, the day should be a collective reflection and a shared recommitment to speak with one voice to affirm a simple, but profound truth: A free, independent and responsible press is indispensable to Uganda's future.

This day is a reminder that press freedom must be defended and practiced with courage, professionalism and humility. In a rapidly changing media and social environment, the responsibility of journalists, editors, publishers, owners, regulators, advertisers, audiences and institutions has never been greater.

At its core, journalism exists to serve the public interest. It informs citizens so they can make decisions about their lives, their communities and their country. It provides a platform for diverse voices. It documents history as it unfolds. It scrutinises power, highlights injustice, celebrates achievements and gives visibility to those often unseen.

In Uganda, the media sits at the intersection of competing pressures: Political, economic, technological and social. Navigating these pressures

while remaining faithful to truth and fairness is not easy. But this difficulty does not diminish our duty.

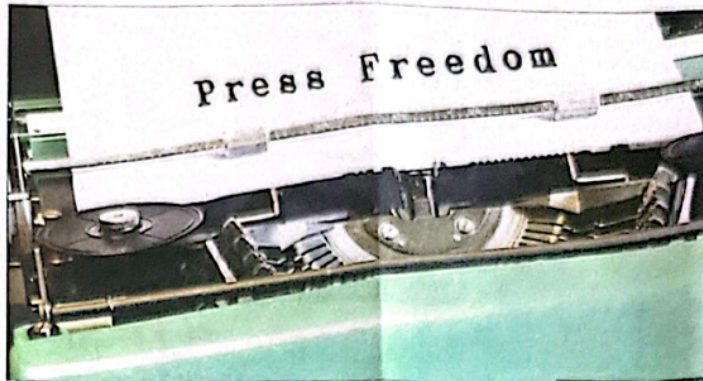
A society that values development, stability and dignity must also value the free exchange of information and ideas. When journalism is weakened through fear, misinformation, self-censorship or economic strangulation, the public is the ultimate loser.

The media is operating in a time of profound change. Digital platforms have expanded access to information and lowered barriers to publication. Social media has amplified voices that were previously excluded. At the same time, these changes have blurred the line between journalism and unverified content, between editorial judgment and algorithmic amplification.

Disinformation, hate speech and co-ordinated manipulation thrive in environments where trust in credible journalism is undermined. This makes professional media more necessary than ever.

Accuracy, verification, context and accountability are values that distinguish journalism from noise. Yet professional journalism does not exist in a vacuum. It requires supportive conditions: Legal protections, economic viability, access to information, physical safety and public trust. World

Press Freedom Day is, therefore, also about examining whether these conditions are being strengthened or eroded.



SHARED COMMITMENT FROM ALL MEDIA HOUSES

- Uphold the highest standards of professional and ethical journalism
- Defend the safety, dignity and independence of journalists
- Provide accurate, fair and inclusive reporting
- Resist misinformation and promote verified facts
- Engage audiences with respect and transparency
- Support solidarity across media platforms and houses

Together, we recommit to telling Uganda's story truthfully, fearlessly and responsibly

Journalism carries risks. Reporters face intimidation, harassment, online abuse, arbitrary arrest and physical violence. Editors are pressured. Media houses are threatened economically. These realities exact a human cost on individuals, families and newsrooms.

When journalists feel unsafe, they may avoid sensitive subjects. When fear replaces curiosity, society's blind spots grow wider. Protecting journalists is not about privileging a profession; it is about protecting the public's right to know.

We call for continued efforts by all relevant institutions and actors to ensure that journalists can work without fear or reprisal and that disputes involving the media are handled through lawful, transparent

and proportionate means.

Press freedom is inseparable from responsibility. The credibility of the media depends on ethical conduct: Fairness, balance, independence, respect for human dignity and a commitment to accuracy even under pressure.

Uganda's media community must continue to invest in strong editorial standards, ongoing training, mentorship and self-regulation. Mistakes should be acknowledged and corrected. Sensationalism should never replace substance. Commercial pressure must not override editorial judgment.

In an era where misinformation can travel faster than facts, journalists must slow down, verify and provide context. Being first

is less important than being right. Trust, once lost, is difficult to regain.

A free press cannot survive on principle alone; it also requires sustainable business models.

Many media houses in Uganda face declining revenues, rising costs and increased competition for audiences and advertising. These economic strains can threaten editorial independence and staff welfare.

We urge advertisers, investors and partners to recognise that supporting credible media is an investment in a stable and informed society.

Fair advertising practices, transparent media buying and respect for editorial independence are essential.

At the same time, media owners and managers must innovate responsibly, exploring new platforms, revenue streams and partnerships without compromising editorial integrity.

Journalists deserve fair pay, safe working conditions and the tools needed to do their jobs well.

For the media to serve the public effectively, access to information is crucial. Transparency by institutions, both public and private, builds trust and improves accountability. When information flows freely and lawfully, journalism becomes more accurate and constructive.

We encourage a culture

in which information is shared proactively, where engagement with the media is seen not as a threat but as a public service. Openness strengthens credibility; secrecy invites suspicion.

Press freedom is not only about journalists and media houses; it is also about audiences.

Citizens play a vital role in sustaining quality journalism by demanding accuracy, supporting credible outlets, questioning dubious information and engaging respectfully.

Media literacy is, therefore, essential.

Understanding how journalism works, how to evaluate sources and how to distinguish fact from opinion empowers citizens and strengthens democracy. We welcome efforts by educators, civil society and media organisations to promote critical thinking and informed consumption of news.

Despite competition, differing editorial lines and commercial realities, World Press Freedom Day reminds us that there are moments when unity matters. On issues of safety, freedom, ethical standards and the public interest, the media must stand together.

An attack on one journalist threatens all. Restrictions on one outlet set precedents that affect others. Solidarity is therefore not symbolic; it is practical and necessary.

As we mark World Press Freedom Day, we do so with honesty and hope. Honesty about the challenges we face. Hope grounded in the resilience, creativity and commitment of Uganda's journalists and media workers.

The future of journalism in Uganda will be shaped by choices made today by newsrooms, regulators, audiences and institutions. Choices about openness versus control. About truth versus expediency. About dialogue versus division.

We choose to affirm that a free press is not a problem to be managed, but a public good to be protected.