

By Nelson Kiya

Yesterday, Uganda joined the rest of the world to mark World Press Freedom Day with the Government declaration that legislation was in the offing to streamline communication.

According to the State Minister for ICT and National Guidance, Godfrey Kabbyanga, the Government is finalising plans to table a comprehensive Communications Bill that will bridge gaps in the media industry.

"What we only want is to be as responsible as possible. Even when you are advising someone, you must be as civil as possible. You must know that you are able to operate because there is peace and stability here. But if there is insecurity, even social media will close and you will have nowhere to report," Kabbyanga said.

The events kicked off with the commemorative walk from Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) grounds in Kampala to Lugogo, Katikati, Kololo, Hotel Africana and back to UBC.

Kabbyanga, media freedom activists and practitioners, journalists and the Uganda Human Rights Commission participated in the walk.

UGANDA MARKS WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

L-R: Kaheru, Kabbyanga and Lamex Apitta Omara during the event to mark the Press Freedom Day yesterday



VIGILANCE IN USING AI

Kabbyanga cautioned journalists and other media practitioners on the responsible use of technology tools, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

"The advent of AI is going to change journalism a lot, but journalists should be careful with misinformation and disinformation or else many will end up in jail," he said.

He rallied media owners, managers and media training institutions, among others, to develop frameworks to promote responsible use of AI.

Kabbyanga disclosed that the ministry is working with the Uganda Media Council to formulate an AI use regulatory framework.

PRESS FREEDOM MINUS STABILITY IS FRAGILE

The Government hailed the Fourth State for shaping public opinion and exposing human rights violations.

Despite media milestones, the minister regretted that unregulated social media and some reckless news reporting continue to taint the public

image of the noble profession.

"A reckless media can inflame conflict; a responsible one prevents it. We have seen it before. Think of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, where radio did not just report events, it urged them on. In Kenya's 2007 post-election crisis, media narratives helped turn tension into mistrust. More recently, social media has played the same dangerous game in places like Myanmar and Ethiopia," Crispin Kaheru, a commissioner at Uganda Human Rights Commission, said.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations General Assembly declared every May 3, to be World Press Freedom Day, observed to raise awareness of the importance of freedom of the press and remind governments of their duty to respect the right of freedom of expression enshrined under Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The day marks the anniversary of the Windhoek Namibia Declaration, a statement of free principles put together by African Journalists in 1991.

In Uganda, Article 29(1) of the 1995 Constitution provides for freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media.

The chairperson of the Media Council of Uganda, Paulo Ekochu, emphasised that accuracy and responsible journalism are critical pillars media must prioritise over distorted facts that mislead the public.

Charity Ahimbisibwe, a media rights activist, urged the Government to support media stations through adverts rather than being selective, noting that it is one way of building an economically resilient industry that remunerates its workers.

Alex Atuhaire from Uganda

Editors' Guild decried the low access to public information, which affects the quality of news.

The media fraternity honoured war journalists who covered the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict in northern Uganda and the Rwanda Genocide. They included Sheila Kawamara, a former *New Vision* journalist.

Journalists used the occasion to call for a good working relationship with security forces, rather than being in conflict all the time.



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