

Opinions

Uganda media 'Wall of Fame'

Last Sunday Uganda media fraternity marked World Press Freedom Day (WPDF) that falls on May 3 with a march from Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) through sections of the city and back to national broadcaster's grounds where a series of speeches were delivered and the annual Uganda Media Sector Working Group (UMSWG) awards given out.

The awards, now in their sixth year, are the focus on this column for the simple reason that the wider public should hear the story of the very deserving awardees, given that for one reason or the other, the mainstream media gave them a wide berth.

Why did the media not give any space to celebrate these legendary journalists? Ms Jan Ajwang, the team leader at civil society organisation, Media Focus in Africa, opined that it is perhaps because "...journalists moved on from themselves!"

Anyhow, the annual UMSWG award ceremony usually features two "Journalism Lifetime Achievement Award" and one "Institutional Award". Some of the past awardees include:

2021: Abdu Katuntu and UMCAT School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

2022: Ben Bella Illakut, Baylon Katahikire, and Uganda Media Women's Association.

2023: Edward Baliddawa and Justice Kenneth Kakuru.

2024: James R. Tumusiime and Wafula Oguttu.

2025: Dr Zadok Ekimwere and Drake Sekeba.

You will note that all in the above list are journalists or media support/training organisations except for three individuals. Baylon Katahikire is a news vendor and at the time of the award, he had been selling newspapers every day for 32 years since he first hit the streets in 1990.

He was awarded "for his important contribution to the business of journalism as a vendor at the last point-of-sale in the print distribution chain."

Mr Edward Baliddawa was recognised

Congratulations to the current and past awardees for their outstanding contribution to Uganda's journalism.

Odoobo C. Bichachi
Public Editor



and awarded "for his outstanding contribution to media development through Information and Communications Technology (ICT)".

He set up and managed *The Monitor's* first website from the USA. *The Monitor* was the first newspaper in Africa to go online.

Justice Kenneth Kakuru was recognised and awarded posthumously "for his outstanding contribution to the protection of freedom of speech, access to information and the whole gamut of rights that he fought to protect and spread."

The 2026 awards honoured two legendary war reporters in recognition of the fact that "War journalism is the pinnacle of journalistic endeavour or the ultimate form of reporting because it demands the highest levels of courage, ethical judgment, and professional skill while reporting from the most dangerous and chaotic locations on earth."

It involves bearing witness to human suffering and documenting historical turning points, often requiring journalists to risk their lives to expose the truth."

This was in tandem with this year's WPDF theme: "Shaping a Future at Peace: Promoting Press Freedom for Human Rights, Development, and Security".

Awardee One: John Muto Ono P. Lajur was awarded the Journalism Lifetime Achievement Award for his outstanding courage

and resilience in documenting and reporting on the 1986 to 2006 civil war in northern Uganda.

He braved it all through 20 years and three rebellions [UPDA, HSM and LRA] to document and tell the world the incredible stories of violence and survival, of innocence and evil, of villains and saviours, of pain and despair, of life and death, of hope and hopelessness, of politics and religion, of war and peace, et cetera.

When the guns fell silent, he went ahead many years later to publish a compendium of these stories in a book titled *War in Northern Uganda: A Journalist's Account* (2021).

Awardee Two: Sheila Kawamara Mishambi was awarded the Journalism Lifetime Achievement Award for her outstanding courage and resilience in documenting and reporting on the 1990 to 1994 civil war and genocide in Rwanda for Uganda audiences.

She was one of the few Uganda journalist [and the only woman] that covered Rwanda civil war from the rear lines of the RPF forces, bringing alive the human and material cost of the Rwandan refugees' journey back home, the price Uganda paid as the incubator and rear guard of the rebels, as well as the barbarity of war.

Awardee Three: The Institutional Award went to Media Challenge Initiative (MCI) for its outstanding contribution to media development in Uganda, particularly in "Supporting and Training young journalist in digital Creator and Solutions Journalism."

Congratulations to the current and past awardees for their outstanding contribution to Uganda's journalism.

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public-editor@ug.nationmedia.com or
call/text on +256 776 500725. WhatsApp
+256 752 500725