

HRCU - WORLD PRESS

THE HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE UGANDA (HRCU)

COMMEMORATION OF WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY, 2020

Saturday 2nd May, 2020

Dear Human Rights Defenders and HRCU Partners,

Greetings from The Human Rights Centre Uganda (HRCU) www.hrcug.org

On Sunday 3rd May, 2020, Uganda will join the world to commemorate the **World Press Freedom Day** under the theme "**Journalism without Fear or Favour**" as a reminder to governments and key stakeholders of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom. It is also a day of reflection among media professionals about issues of press freedom and professional ethics; a day to support journalists and media practitioners who/which are targets for the restraint or abolition of press freedom. Journalists who lost their lives in the pursuit of newsworthy stories are also remembered on the day.¹

This year's commemoration comes at a time when many nations of the World are under lock down due to the Covid-19 pandemic that has led to restrictions on movement, social gatherings and public meetings or events. It therefore means that the day will be commemorated remotely by various actors.

It may be stated that human rights defenders, including journalists are always at the forefront of seeking the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in a peaceful manner. The press and media play a crucial role in providing a platform for HRDs and the citizenry at large to express and share information. While addressing the nation on Tuesday April 31, 2020 in order to give further guidelines to contain the spread of Covid-19, His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni mentioned that the media/journalists would receive stickers from the Ministry of Works and would continue working since they were classified under essential services/service providers.² However there continues to be several challenges that hinder press freedoms in Uganda. Journalists continue to report that the poor working remuneration and working conditions has a negative impact on their ability to exercise reporting independently.³ Additionally, Media

¹ <https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/worldpressfreedomday>

² Daily Monitor, Wednesday April 1, 2020: Lockdown: Media part of essential services, says Museveni; <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Lockdown-Media-part-essential-services-Museveni/688334-5510428-8s8xey/index.html>

³ HRDs Situational Analysis Report, 2019

practitioners continue to experience acts of intimidation and violence in the course of their work which is a violation of press freedoms. There have been incidences of arbitrary arrests and detention, acts of torture and aggression towards Journalists in the course of their work.⁴

HRCU appreciates the important role played by the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, Journalists' Unions and associations, media houses and their management, individual journalists and other key stakeholders in ensuring that the public is kept informed about the developments within their communities during the rather difficult time of the pandemic.

HRCU takes this opportunity to wish fellow human rights defenders, including journalists a peaceful commemoration of World Press Freedom Day.

Recommendations:

1. The State and other duty bearers should be mindful of the needs and aspirations of human rights defenders so that in dealing with them, they do not demoralize them in their quest for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. All Journalists and other media practitioners should be given protective gear and continuously enhance their capacity on how best to continue to do their work effectively . The safety of journalists should be a priority for all relevant stakeholders.
3. The State must ensure that all relevant stakeholders work towards ensuring that journalists work under good contractual terms.
4. Whereas the regulation of the media is important, the government needs to put its emphasis on creating an enabling and robust policy framework to encourage an independent, critical and development oriented media as opposed to insisting on restricting legislation. Laws such as the Computer Misuse Act, criminal defamation provisions and offensive communication need to be reviewed and reformed with the view of empowering the media as opposed to constraining its operations.
5. HRCU recommends that all human rights defenders and media practitioners should continue to be mindful of the guidelines to prevent further spread of the Corona Virus as they continue doing their work during the lock down. Wash hands regularly using soap or an alcohol-based sanitizer; Maintain social distance of at least four (4) meters and stay safe and at home
6. Human rights defenders, including journalists across the country are also advised to continue monitoring, documenting and reporting human rights

⁴ <https://rsf.org/en/uganda>

abuses and violations so that the perpetrators can be brought to book or held accountable.

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HRCU Team

