

**JOINT PRESS STATEMENT On THE COMmemoration OF THE WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY (wpfd) 2024**

**venue:** UGANDA MEDIA CENTRE

**Date:** 23RD APRIL 2024

On 3rd May 2024, Uganda, like in the past years, will join the rest of the global community to commemorate the World Press Freedom Day 2024. The day was proclaimed in 1993 by the United Nations General Assembly. We are marking the Day under the global theme, ‘**A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the face of the Environmental Crisis**’, to highlight the crisis and the role/importance of journalism and freedom of expression in shaping solutions to the impending global disaster.

World Press Freedom Day is annually commemorated to emphasize to governments and the public at large to fulfil their commitments and obligations on press/media freedom; for media professionals and stakeholders to reflect on the state of press freedom and professional ethics; and to mobilise support and solidarity for media practitioners and journalists that are targeted for harm because of their professional duty. We also remember the journalists who lost their lives in the course of their work. At least 99 journalists and media workers were killed in 2023 across the world.

This year, the media fraternity in Uganda is moving in unison under the leadership of the Uganda Media Sector Working Group (UMSWG), to bring attention to the global environmental crisis that has not spared Uganda, and amplify the role of journalism in supporting efforts to combat it. The consortium led by the UMSWG includes: State partners – The Media Council of Uganda, The Uganda Human Rights Commission and the Uganda Communications Commission; as well as non-state partners -- The African Centre for Media Excellence, Uganda Editors’ Guild, Media Focus on Africa, Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda, Uganda National Academy of Sciences, Health Journalists Network Uganda, Media Challenge Initiative, International Training Programme, Northern Uganda Media Club, Elgon Journalists’ Association, Umbrella for Journalists Kasese, and Teso Journalists for Community Empowerment.

Freedom of expression and freedom of the media stakeholders and enthusiasts are very much alive to the global environmental crisis which is also a sad reality in Uganda. The impact of the steadily increasing global warming as a result of human activity is threatening human life and health as well as biodiversity, with some species facing extinction. Globally, the rapid growth of human consumption, population, global trade and urbanisation in the last 50 years has resulted in humanity using more of the Earth’s resources than it can replenish naturally. Our country that was originally endowed by nature is at the moment facing a crisis of s**oil degradation, deforestation,** overfishing, increasing water and food insecurity, pollution of air, water and food, among others.

These can be attributed to urbanisation that is devoid of proper planning; irresponsible and unsustainable economic activities including farming, mining, industry; poor waste disposal that causes non-biodegradable matter to end up in landfills and water sources; plus the inadequate attention to other dimensions of the environmental crisis such as the governance crisis, the gender question, the disregard for the human rights-based approach, the lack of or inadequate information to empower stakeholders to take action; impunity and the lack of accountability.

In the spirit of this year’s theme, challenging us to take action to address the environmental challenges, we would like to highlight the important role of the media in championing good environmental practices and policies, and to draw attention to the requisite conditions for the media to provide the required accurate and reliable information for holding powers to account and the platforms for debate. The media require independence, safety and security of journalists, capacity and adherence to professional ethics to effectively play this role. Journalists and newsrooms in Uganda require skills, resources and a conducive atmosphere for environment reporting to thrive or for them to mainstream environmental issues in their other respective specialised beats.

We are hereby calling on all stakeholders including the journalists, editorial managers, media owners, professional associations, regulators, trainers, policy and law makers, to make or renew their commitment to collectively reinvigorate society’s duty and ability to defend media freedom and independence in the face of the environmental crisis. Journalists keep people informed, uncover and expose facts that may not necessarily be appreciated by some sections of society. This often puts them on a collision path with the powerful, the culprits -- the abusers and violators of rights, and sometimes their employers, resulting in repercussions of differing gravity, with loss of lives at the extreme. Without adequate safeguards, the efforts on ensuring **‘a press for the planet’** will be in vain as press freedom, independent and quality journalism will not be able to be part of the solutions to the global environmental crisis.

As is tradition, the World Press Freedom Day will also be an occasion to honour the memory of the journalists who gave their lives to keep people informed and to find ways of ensuring that their sacrifice was not in vain. By joining together for this special cause, we can empower each other, kindle the spirit of solidarity and usher in a future brimming with potential for truth, transparency and accountability.

This year’s commemoration is spread across the entire week from Saturday 27th April to Friday 3rd May 2024. Activities will be held across the country in Kampala and four regions of Uganda namely, Gulu, Mbale, Teso-Karamoja and Rwenzori, to mobilise media freedom and environmental promoters to amplify the case for better environmental protection policies, and practices as well as better accountability on environmental and climate change issues in Uganda.

The activities will be as follows:

A national dialogue on media and the environment in Kampala on 3rd May 2024 under the theme: **A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the Face of Environmental Crisis.** It will be held at Makerere University College of Engineering Design Art and Technology Conference Hall.

During the dialogue, Lifetime Awards to recognise THREE individuals that have made significant contributions or breakthroughs in the media sector will be handed out.

This year, the media fraternity will also seek to demonstrate the importance of protecting the environment by planting trees. The focal point of this tree planting will be in Soroti.

**Regional dialogues** will be held in Northern Region, Teso and Kabarole in the days before 3rd May the outcomes of which will feed into the national dialogue in Kampala.

**A sports gala** will be held in Soroti attracting all stakeholders through the different sports activities of the day.

**Two Photo exhibitions** that demonstrate the reporting of environment stories will be staged in Northern Uganda and Kampala.

A sustained media campaign on climate, the environment and media will be on radio, print, broadcast and social media to raise awareness on the WPFD and the issues related to the theme.

As a media multi-stakeholder we are concerned by the growing degradation of our environment that is caused by spiralling growing deforestation, reclamation of swamps, which are water catchment areas, all of which are contributing to the climate crisis in Uganda and the world at large.

We have also noted the apparent helplessness and or impotence of the different enforcement institutions to regulate and clamp down on these debilitating practices and activities.

We hope that ultimately, we shall increase awareness about issues of the media and the environment; freedom of expression, freedom of the media and the need to protect journalists and media practitioners; and draw the attention of duty bearers and the citizenry to the critically urgent matter of the environment catastrophe facing our country and our Earth.

**Call for Action**

We call upon the government to: support all the press efforts to bring awareness on issues affecting the environment; initiate and pass appropriate policies and laws that will encourage and facilitate proper coverage of environmental issues.

We also call upon the public to support and where relevant, to give and facilitate the Press with information and access on issues affecting the environment.

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Paulo Ekochu Dr George Lugalambi

**Chairman, Media Council of Uganda Executive Director, ACME/UMSWG Coordinator**