

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY Shaping A Future of Rights: Freedom of Expression as a Driver for all Other Human Rights, 3 May 2023

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The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, Ourveena Geereesha Topsy-Sonoo, on behalf of the African Commission, joins the international community in commemorating **World Press Freedom Day**, which is observed on 03 May.

World Press Freedom Day was so designated by the UN General Assembly in order to raise awareness of the importance of freedom of the press and remind Governments of their duty to respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression. The theme of this year's commemoration is '**Shaping a future of rights: Freedom of expression as a driver for all other human rights.**'

The Preamble of the **Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa** (2019) highlights the *"key role of the media and other means of communication in ensuring full respect for the right to freedom of expression, promoting the free flow of information and ideas, assisting individuals in making informed decisions and facilitating and strengthening democracy."*

Considering this key role, the Commission takes this opportunity to commend the commitment which has been observed in Africa to enabling a free press and freedom of expression, through the proliferation of independent media in many countries and the rise of digital technologies enabling the free flow of information online.

Whereas there have been many notable human rights advancements in Africa, as across the world. However the protection of media freedom, the safety of journalists and freedom of expression are facing growing threats, which have negative consequences for the promotion of human rights.

The global community is confronted with a range of crises, including armed conflicts and violence, persistent socio-economic disparities leading to migration, environmental emergencies, and threats to public health. Meanwhile, disinformation and misinformation proliferate both online and offline, causing serious harm to institutions that uphold democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Polarized political and social discussions, the erosion of trust, the imposition of states of emergency and internet shutdowns, suppression on critical voices and independent media, and the need to address hate speech and online harms that violate human rights standards, all represent continuing threats to freedom of expression.

To combat these critical situations and dangers, press freedom, the safety of journalists and access to information must be given top priority. The right to freedom of expression as enshrined in Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, is a crucial prerequisite and driver for the enjoyment of all other human rights.

There is therefore a need to emphasize the importance of press freedom, as well as independent, diverse, and pluralistic media, as crucial elements for the realization of all other human rights.

As we celebrate World Press Freedom Day, the Commission calls on African governments to safeguard and promote press freedom, and support independent and diverse media outlets, as well as to protect the right to freedom of expression and access to information, including online

and offline, in order to combat disinformation and propaganda. We further urge governments to ensure that journalists are able to work in a safe and secure environment, free from harassment, intimidation, and violence as provided for in **Principle 20** of the 2019 Declaration. In addition to this, the Commission urges Governments to combat discrimination and promote social cohesion, taking into particular consideration the rights of marginalized groups, including women, children, refugees, and migrants. We also urge media organizations to continue their important work in informing and educating the public, holding governments accountable, and promoting the values of democracy and human rights.

Press freedom is essential to building a better future for all Africans. It is a vital driver for social, economic, and political development, and an essential element in promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance. As we mark this important day, let us reaffirm our commitment to upholding press freedom.

Honourable Commissioner Geereesha Topsy-Sonoo, African Commission Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa