Dr Mithika Mwenda, Executive Director, PACJA speech during the World Press Day 2022

Today is the 3rd of May, marked globally as the World Press Day, a day dedicated to remind governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom.

It is also a day when media professionals reflect about issues of press freedom, professional ethics and recent developments in the industry.

Just as importantly, World Press Freedom Day is a day of support for media which are targets for the restraint, or abolition, of press freedom.

The World Press Freedom Day is a proclamation of the UN General Assembly on December 1993. This was made possible through a recommendation of UNESCO's General Conference held in Windhoek Namibia in 1991 that led to the creation of the Windhoek Declaration.

The theme of this year’s World Freedom Press Day is “digital siege.” This theme resonates well with our work at the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA).

At PACJA, we have an elaborate digital media strategy, including a variety of digital platforms for disseminating our climate change campaign messages including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube among others.

In addition, our teams of activists including the young digital activists have been a strong, consistent digital communications technologies users to advance climate action and governance around the world.

In these critical moments of our times, our farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and policy makers demand information to help counter the effects of climate change on their business and operations.
Thus, working with the media is important. It is imperative that journalists are supported by all stakeholders, including the governments at all levels.

Such support will lessen reliance on the fake news and widespread disinformation which have capability to forestall needed development.

The society needs media but the society also has to enable the media to operate and play their role as the watch dog of the society.

Democracy can only flourish in an environment where the media is facilitated to be an essential pillar of society.

In my many years of my being active in the civil society, I have come to appreciate the place of the media in the good of the society despite the many challenges they face including sometimes intimidation, violence, lack of access to information for the media and the expression of critical or opposing viewpoints and the debilitating excessive political, legal and extra-legal constraints.

Further, I can rightly say that the Media has and continues in its functions to inform, educate, and to propagate useful information that the society uses to advance itself.

In addition, the media are without doubt the most appropriate outlets in gauging public opinion.

As a member of the CSO, I have been at fore front to encourage the media to establish media systems that respond to the people’s needs and their rights to communicate and to participate in information generation and dissemination.

However, I am not oblivious to the effect of Fake News, particularly in the social media.

Although the Social media has become almost an inevitable part of our society now, we can’t always depend on it.

Every day we read bunches of things online on social media, which may happen to be true, often is not.

This false or misinformation leads to fake news i.e. consisted of fabricated stories, without any verifiable facts, sources, or quotes. Those stories are forged to influence reader’s own opinions or to deceive them.

Africa cannot afford Fake News. Neither should journalists accept their growth.
As PACJA, we are running a number of media programmes and initiatives to empower journalists connect with their news sources, gain ability to report factually, with clarity and in a balanced manner.

For example, we have run the African Climate change and Environmental Reporting (ACCER) Award since 2013 with the aim to encourage the media shape the African narrative which is to counter the biased framing of the African issues in the international discourses.

In addition, we have the pan African Media for climate change (PAMACC) which has brought the media practitioners under one umbrella.

Annually, we also conduct the media training through the Media Academy.

Dr Mithika Mwenda

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