

Press Statement for Immediate Release

South Sudan| Press Freedoms must be protected as enshrined in the South Sudanese Constitution.

(Juba/ May 3,2023) The South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN) joins Journalists and media practitioners to commemorate the globally recognized Press Freedom Day; a day when we celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom and the crucial role that journalists play in promoting transparency, accountability, and democracy.

Individuals and institutions have the unfettered right to express themselves through the media without censorship or interference, it is also a fundamental right enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

While in South Sudan global provisions on press freedom have been domesticated in the 2011 Revitalized National Transitional Constitution, the press grapples with significant challenges such as the surveillance, confiscation of newspapers and the closure of radio stations. Journalists face harassment, intimidation, and violence, and many have been imprisoned for their reporting. All these hinder their ability to report on important issues which becomes a human right issue.

"This year's Press Freedom Day comes at the backdrop of recent arrests of 6 South Sudanese journalists under unclear charges to date and subjected to prolonged ungazetted detention as documented by the Union of Journalists in South Sudan" states James Bidal we call upon and implore the government to ensure protection and sufficient safeguards to ensure a free press"

According to the most recent World Press Freedom Index, South Sudan ranks 128 out of 180 countries, with a score of 47.06, indicating that Freedom of the press is extremely precarious in South Sudan, where journalists work under constant threat and intimidation, and where censorship is ever-present. With these challenges at hand, it is crucial to recognize the significant role that journalists play in holding those in power accountable and keeping the public informed. It is also the obligation of government to ensure the respect and protection of the right to freedom of expression and the press, as enshrined in the country's constitution and international human rights law.



On this World Press Freedom Day, we therefore call on the government of the Republic of South Sudan to;

- Ensure concrete steps to promote and protect press freedom through promoting a culture of transparency and openness including instructing security agencies to provide protection for journalists and media workers.
- Establish mechanisms to monitor threats to journalists and to investigate and prosecute those who attack or harass them.
- Respect and fully give the independent media regulatory body professional mandate as globally recognized of a similar body to ensure that the media operates in a professional and ethical manner, without undue interference or censorship; this will help to promote media diversity and accountability, and ensure that journalists are able to operate without fear of reprisal.
- Ensure journalists have access to information and are able to report on issues of public interest. This can be done by enacting freedom of information laws and ensuring that government officials are accountable to the public.
- Institute platforms of regular engagements with Journalists and media practitioners as Human Rights Defenders with government agencies.
- Ensure journalists alleged to have committed offenses are subjected to due process inclusive of right to legal representation and fair hearing.

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