



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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**MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGY**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD PRESS FREEDOM
DAY COMMEMORATION**

5 MAY 2022

WINDHOEK

Director of Ceremonies

Ambassador Sinikka Antila, EU Ambassador to Namibia

Mr Djaffar Moussa-Elkadhum, UNESCO Head of Office and Representative to Namibia

Representatives from Media Houses

Stakeholders Representatives

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are gathered here yet again to celebrate the World Press Freedom Day, following the successful hosting of the global event in Windhoek, Namibia last year, which coincided with the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration.

The event that was held under the theme Information as a Public Good, saw the return of the Windhoek Declaration to its home where it was founded and eventually led to the adoption of this landmark declaration and the promotion of an independent, free and pluralistic press.

At the conclusion of this global event, Namibia together with the rest of the international community adopted the Windhoek +30 Declaration that called for the promotion of a more inclusive, pluralistic and sustainable media sector amongst others.

This declaration was further adopted by the 41st session of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris, France. The adoption of the Windhoek +30 Declaration by the 41st session of the UNESCO General Conference demonstrates how Namibia continues to play a leading role in advocating for free and independent media on a global level.

In other words, the World Press Freedom Day affords us an opportunity to voice our support for journalists who continue to provide the public with reliable and timely information – a task that has not only become more important, especially in a time where misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms hamper the good work done by journalists.

Director of Ceremonies

Esteemed Invited Guests

This year's celebration is being observed under the theme; *Journalism under Digital Siege*. I view this as a fitting theme for this year's celebrations as we take stock of digital trends that pose a great threat to freedom of expression in the journalism profession.

There is a growing trend globally where technology companies are monitoring the work of journalists and information shared by their sources. Unauthorised surveillance can expose information gathered by journalists including from whistle-blowers and may also harm the safety of all involved by disclosing sensitive private information which could be used to threaten the principle of a free and independent press. It is, therefore, important at this occasion to make a call to technology companies globally to ensure that they are transparent with their human and automated systems to remain within the framework of democracy and freedom of the press.

Similarly, I call on technological establishments to counter misinformation and disinformation with free, factual and evidence-based information and avoid excessive efforts that could result in censorship of protected speech.

Director of Ceremonies

Esteemed Invited Guests

Namibia has moved up from position 24 to 18 globally and it is now rated the second-best African country in terms of press freedom according to the latest Press Freedom Index. The Government remains committed to creating a positive and enabling environment for freedom of expression and access to information, online and offline, in line with international guarantees of these rights, including a free, independent and pluralistic media, through transparently adopting appropriate legal measures and following adequate public consultation, guaranteeing the exercise of journalism free of interference as required by the Windhoek +30 Declaration. Furthermore, promoting universal access to the Internet, and ensure the safety of journalists.

As a government we continue to take effective steps to foster diversity and viable public, private and community media, and implement specific policies, along with relevant safeguards, to promote the production of independent, quality journalism, to ensure people's access to relevant, diverse and reliable information.

In this regard, the Ministry is busy finalising the Community Media Policy Framework within the current financial year. The Community Media Policy Framework will

strengthen the development of community media in the country, more especially community radios, which by extension will empower communities at the grassroots level. The Ministry remains steadfast in implementing this important policy.

Director of Ceremonies

Esteemed Invited Guests

Given that access to information is one of the cornerstones of freedom, we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that the Access to Information bill is passed. As you are all aware, the Bill was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information, Communication Technology and Innovation. The Parliamentary Standing Committee concluded public hearings in February 2022, and the Bill is now back to the august House to follow the normal legislative process that would eventually culminate into producing a law.

As I have informed Parliament during the motivation of the Budget Vote of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, while we prepare for the enactment of Access to Information and its implementation thereof, the Ministry will in the meantime conduct an Information Access Impact Survey to determine the percentage of the population that has access to information and establish the impact it makes on the citizenry, as well as identify gaps that hinders access to information. This survey will indicate how best Government can ensure access to information, especially in an ever-changing digital era and further inform the Ministry on how to adjust its information dissemination strategies to meet the needs of the Namibian people.

In conclusion, I would like to re-iterate that, without freedom of the press, democracy would not flourish. Therefore, it is our responsibility as stakeholders to continue protecting the independence of the media and promote the freedom of the press and at the same time encouraging the media to be responsible and disseminate accurate and fact-based information. A free press and responsible reporting is crucial for functioning and thriving democracies such as Namibia.

I thank you for your undivided attention.