



**MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION
*MINISTÈRE DE LA COMMUNICATION***

**WORLD PRESS
FREEDOM DAY 2021**

STATEMENT

OF

H. E. René Emmanuel SADI

**MINISTER OF COMMUNICATION
GOVERNMENT'S SPOKESPERSON**

Yaoundé, May 3, 2021

Dear Journalists and Media Professionals,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cameroon, together with the International Community, is celebrating on this day, May 3, 2021, the World Press Freedom Day.

This is first and foremost, I should recall, the expression of a collective aspiration. That of a whole people: the people of Cameroon, longing for liberty and rightfully wishing to have their views, voices and choices considered in the conduction of national affairs, of which it is and remains the main actor and stake.

It is even more importantly, we should not forget, the expression of a political will, that of the President of the Republic, H.E. Paul BIYA who, in his established foresightedness, decided to turn the page of monolithism

which was not conducive to the emergence and expression of public freedoms.

Indeed, Cameroon is today a democratic country where press freedom is a reality. The merit goes to President Paul BIYA.

We should avail ourselves of this opportunity to pay him a deserved tribute.

This year's celebration, it should be recalled, coincides with that of the 30th anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration of May 3, 1991.

On that day, as you all know, UNESCO, together with the States of the world, laid the foundations of what has become one of the pillars of modern democracy: the emergence of a Free, Independent and Pluralist Press.

It is therefore a distinct pleasure for me to address you on this occasion.

Three decades after the Windhoek Declaration, the map of press freedom in the world is still greatly contrasted. Though

considerable efforts have been made in many countries to improve on the conditions for access to a free and reliable information, the situation remains, in many others, a cause for concern.

In fact, in several countries, Journalists and media professionals are still subject to serious violations of their rights and all kinds of abuses in the practice of their profession.

This state of insecurity that haunts the daily life of men and women of the media is a cause for concern for all democratic States including Cameroon, that respect Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

It goes without saying that our country did not wait for Windhoek and May 3, 1991, to assert its stance in favour of Press Freedom and the right of citizens to information.

It is in fact with the Law No. 90/052 of December 19, 1990 relating to Freedom of Social Communication, that Cameroon stepped into the field of freedoms peculiar to the media.

We owe this undeniable and remarkable progress primarily, as I said earlier and reiterate, to the President of the Republic, His Excellency Paul BIYA.

Thanks to this eminently liberal framework, which instituted both the freedom to undertake and the freedom to publish, Cameroon today has more than 600 newspapers which are published regularly, nearly a hundred radio broadcasting stations, about thirty Television broadcasting channels and an impressive number of online media.

At the editorial level, there is a clearly marked freedom of tone, with no restrictions other than that prescribed by the rules of ethics and professional conduct or by the law.

There is therefore no doubt about that: all the media actors worthy of the name operating in Cameroon, do so in total

freedom and independence. They are all judged only by the rules of ethics and professional conduct and the protection of the rights of others and those of the community as in any democratic and organized society.

Therefore, I may say, without presumptuousness, that Cameroon can truly be considered as a country of democracy and freedom.

Although we can therefore boast of the notable achievements and of the undeniable progress of this media pluralism and the proven Freedom of speech, we observe with regret, a certain tendency towards the recurrence of professional malpractices.

These include: the publication of fake news, attacks on the honour, consideration, and dignity of others; the publication of false information; defamation; insults; calls to sedition; hate speech and tribal and identity discrimination; hostility to the fatherland, just to name a few.

This situation is further magnified by the upsurge and generalisation of social networks in the social sphere, remarkable through fake news, and their relay by the conventional media.

In addition to this, regrettably, the media and journalists are increasingly being instrumentalized by lobbies and other actors hiding in the dark.

This particularly dangerous practice has given rise to a hired press whose action appears to be exceptionally bad for the image of the profession and, consequently, that of Cameroon both at home and abroad.

Admittedly, the Cameroonian Press operates in a very difficult environment in terms of economic viability of its companies and human resources.

The government is fully aware of this situation.

In the sub-sector of the Print Press, these difficulties are mainly related to the material production that increase the

cost of production, and the weakness, or even non-existence of distribution channels, which limits the presence of newspapers on the market.

After all, these serious shortcomings make the Print Media a product with low or, better still, no profits.

As concerns audiovisual media, the importance of investments and operating costs in this sub-sector, is poorly compensated by the narrowness of the advertising market. This makes audiovisual companies perpetually loss-making companies.

In general terms, and even more seriously, the instability or even the non-existence of salaries and career profiles in most press companies makes it difficult to exercise the profession.

But in any case, the extent of these difficulties alone cannot justify the persistent abuses observed in the media landscape.

Indeed, needless to remind you that in a Rule of Law, exercising the profession of journalist is governed by a set of rules and supervised by the law.

The fact that certain deviant behaviours deliberately become the norm, in violation of laws and codes of ethics and professional conduct constitutes a breach of Press Freedom and a backward step for Democracy.

Moreover, in a world where technological progress and social media have eased the flow of information, with a flood of topics from a variety of sources, rigorous fact checking must remain the professional demarcation line and a cardinal necessity.

Indeed, we must permanently bear in mind that the dissemination of unverified news can, in a context such as ours, constitute grounds for the destruction of our national cohesion.

It is therefore urgent for the Press and media professionals, to retake ownership of the basic rules that govern their profession, to be abide by the fundamental values of our democratic model, to keep in mind the necessary respect for legislation and to reinforce our culture of citizenship.

In that regard, as the supervisory authority of the Communication sector, it seems that putting the preservation of the higher interests of the nation above all is not at odds with the freedom and independence of journalists.

Such a choice is a proof of citizenship, and it should represent the bedrock of your professional practice.

I would also like to emphasise the need for you to take responsibility for yourself; first and foremost, to rehabilitate your profession through self-regulation mechanisms which, once they are reliable and credible, will necessarily take precedence over regulation and recourse to legal action.

Distinguished Journalists and Media Professionals,

I would now like to share with you a reflection on the theme chosen by UNESCO this year for the celebration of the World Press Freedom Day, namely “Information as a Public Good”

For the Government, as guarantor of all public goods, this theme highlights the fact that information is a valuable commodity that must be defended by all.

As a public good, information is thus the source that enables citizens to be informed about the major issues of public life. Moreover, this way, it must make everyone feel safe.

For its part, the Government, under the Esteemed Guidance of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Paul BIYA, strives on a daily basis to provide our citizens with credible and transparent information on the life of the Nation, through your media, which are undeniable, if not essential partners in achieving this objective.

To this end, the Ministry of Communication will continue to do its utmost best to improve the conditions for the emergence of a true Press Freedom and a Quality Press in Cameroon.

In this respect and in general, the implementation of the resolutions of the 2012 Communication Forum remains one of our priorities. These recommendations are undoubtedly a basis for a sustainable cleaning up of the press environment.

In the same vein, the Ministry of Communication will continue to advocate with the Prime Minister, Head of Government, for an increase in the Institutional Support to Private Media, in line with the macroeconomic and societal constraints facing the country.

But already, with the forthcoming completion of the implementation texts of Law No. 2015/007 of 15 April 2015 governing the audiovisual sector in Cameroon, the Audiovisual Support Fund created by the said law will enter into its operational phase.

Besides, in conjunction with professional organisations, joint platforms are being set up to find sustainable solutions for rationalising production costs and structuring distribution networks in the Print Press Sector, through professional pooling mechanisms based on public-private partnerships in the Graphic Arts and Postal Transport sectors.

It goes without saying however, that all these actions undertaken by the Government can only yield convincing results in terms of economic viability of the media and the emergence of a prosperous and good quality Press, if the actors resolve to make their change themselves, so that real media enterprises emerge, supported by modern managerial methods and in compliance with established norms thereof.

Distinguished Journalists and Media Professionals,

A day dedicated to Press on a global scale is not only the ideal opportunity given to us, to list the series of diverse abuses to the noble profession of yours, or otherwise to dwell at length

on the throes of the Press which is in lack of financial means and is struggling with precariousness.

It is also and probably more of an opportunity to reiterate and to hail the important role of this sector in the Nation, and consequently, its major role in the information, education of popular masses, and awakening of collective conscience, as well as the search for solutions to the challenges we are facing; be they political, security-related, economical or socio-cultural.

Certainly, such awareness is what the World Day we are celebrating together today is urging you.

Indeed, it is at this price that, together, we will successfully work towards emergence, existence and development of a Free, Independent, Sustainable, Reliable and Responsible Press.

It is on this note that I wish each and every one of you a happy World Press Freedom Day.

Thank you for your attention.