

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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African Union and UNESCO join efforts in support of a free, sustainable and fit for purpose African media

The third African Media Convention (AMC) held from the 15th to 17th of May in Accra, Ghana within the framework of the UNESCO led World Press Freedom Day and in line with the AU's commitment to support a fit for purpose media, was characterized by dynamic discussions, capacity building for journalists and an action plan of the key recommendations.

The media stakeholders, including the government of the host country, unanimously agreed on the indispensable role of the media in Africa's development and its potential to shape public discourse, remove barriers for marginalized groups, foster innovation, and advocate for environmental conservation and sustainability.



Under the theme: ***"The African Media We Want: Enhancing Freedom, Innovation, and Environmental Sustainability in a Dynamic World,"*** the third edition of the premier annual continental media event, brought together AU

organs, UNESCO, other UN institutions, journalists and other media workers, media organizations, civil society, the academia, policymakers, and other media development partners from across the continent and the international community. Topics for discussion included environmental journalism, media freedom, freedom of expression, access to information, safety of journalists, media Information literacy and digital competencies, leveraging on the Universal Period Review (UPR), and the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) country review to promote a media fit for purpose. Other topics were media viability, inclusion in the media of persons with disabilities, production of content in indigenous and sign languages, and the intersection of Africa media with artificial intelligence (AI). The convention also discussed the African Union theme of the year on education, with special focus on the rights of African children to education.

H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the President of the Republic of Ghana, emphasized on the need for the press to enlighten and mobilize society towards a common goal that respects the truth and dignity of all individuals. He further reiterated the need for the media to navigate the challenges of misinformation and combat falsehoods in its reportage, in order to maintain its credibility. On the issue of climate change, the President charged the media to use its powerful tools to amplify the voices of those affected by the menace, especially, communities that are overlooked during international discourses. The President further reaffirmed the commitment of the Ghanaian law enforcement agencies, to bring to book the killers of the investigative journalist Hussein-Suale.

Hon. Fatima Abubhakar, Ghana's Minister for Information designate, emphasized the importance of collaboration to empower and protect journalists. She highlighted the government's initiatives, such as the Coordinated Mechanism on Safety for Journalists (CMSJ) and the Media Capacity Enhancement Programme (MCEP), which have benefited over 140 journalists. "To combat misinformation, the government has launched a central hub for official information, helping citizens discern fact from fiction. Additionally, the government supports media literacy programs to help citizens critically evaluate information" said H.E Abubhakar.

In her address, Ms. Leslie Richer, the AU Director of Information and Communication, delivered a keynote address, emphasizing the need for an empowered and sustainable African media, capable of shaping the right African narrative and urging the media to play their rightful part in achieving the goals of Agenda 2063. "We, as communicators, have a key role to play in shifting the narrative of Africa. We can no longer be bystanders while others define, rewrite, and tell our story. The AMC shouldn't just be an annual event; it should be the foundation for building a strong network of African media and content creators with a united front, elevating the African narrative for our citizens and global audiences," she said.

The AU Director further challenged the media stakeholders to transform African media into a trusted source of news about Africa. She stressed that this would involve strengthening the media's capacity and collaboration between national news agencies and public broadcasters, ultimately building a continent-wide pan-African media fit for purpose.

Speaking at the same convention, the UNESCO Director for the Addis Ababa Liaison Office to the AU, Dr Rita Bissoonauth, emphasized on the important role of the media. "At UNESCO, we recognize that the media's role extends far beyond reporting news. It is about nurturing informed and engaged societies; it's about holding power to account, and importantly, it is about shaping the future through responsible and innovative storytelling. This convention has offered us a unique platform to address these multifaceted challenges and to collaboratively forge pathways that enhance the resilience and sustainability of media in Africa" said Dr. Bissoonauth.

The AMC was conceived in 2021 by the East African Editors Forum, the UNESCO Liaison Office to the AU and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and UNESCO National Office in Da-es salaam, in close consultation and collaboration with the African Union's Directorate of Information and Communication. It emerged out of a growing need to engage with all the African media stakeholders in addressing the unique challenges and opportunities facing media in the digital age. Recognizing the critical role of a free and viable media on the continent, the African Union through its Specialised Technical Committee on Communication and Information and Communication Technologies (STCCICT) held in November 2023, endorsed the annual AMC as a collaborative platform for the African Media. To this end, The AU has joined efforts with UNESCO and other media stakeholders to host the annual event, review the challenges facing the media, identify opportunities and propose actions to make the African media fit for purpose in contributing to the achievement of Agenda 2023 and SDGs.

Planning for this year's event was planned and executed by an AMC steering committee led by Churchill Otieno, the local organizing committee led by the President of the Ghana Journalists Association Albert Dwumfour, the Government of Ghana through the Ministry of Information, the African Union Directorate of Information and Communication, UNESCO through its Addis Ababa Liaison office to the AU and UNECA, the International Fund for Public Interest Media, and the African media stakeholders.

To show commitment to building a free, vibrant, and impactful press for Africa, Ministers and representatives of ministries of information and communication from Ethiopia, Burundi, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Zambia and Namibia attended the event. They all expressed commitment to upholding the principles of press freedom, access to information and safety of journalists. They shared best practices from their respective countries, aiming to foster a thriving media environment across the continent.

Also, in attendance were H.E Ms Akosua Osei-Opere, Ghana's Chief of Staf; Mr. Charles Abani, UN Resident Coordinator; Mr James Dean, co-founder of the International Fund for Public Interest Media; and Mr. Marcel C. Akpovo the Regional Representative for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the East Africa Regional Office.

Outcomes:

The AMC concluded with a renewed commitment from media stakeholders to collaborate on initiatives aimed at strengthening African media. These initiatives include:

- Developing a Pan-African Strategy on Media and Information Literacy.
- Creating a comprehensive capacity-building programme for African media, focused on Artificial Intelligence.
- Facilitating movement building, campaigns, and coalitions to ensure the online safety of female journalists remains a priority for all key stakeholders.
- Building capacity to produce and disseminate relevant and accessible media content, particularly in indigenous and lesser-used minority languages, as well sign language.
- Special focus on including persons with disabilities in the media.

- Leveraging on UPR and APRM country reviews to promote freedom of expression, access to information and the safety of journalists.

Download to read the third [AMC Declaration](#) and [AMC Action Plan](#) here

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