

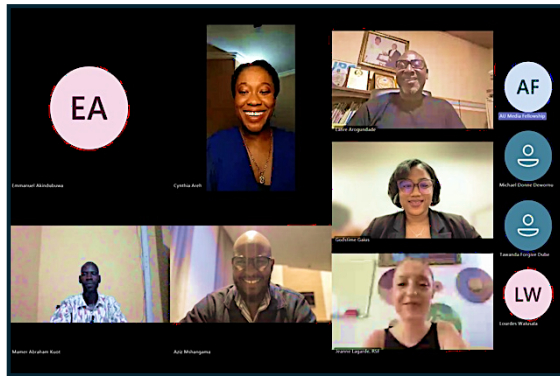
INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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AU Media Fellowship 3.0 Fireside Chat on World Press Freedom Day 2026

“Shaping a Future at Peace: Press Freedom, Journalism and the Pursuit of Human Rights in Africa”



The African Union Media Fellowship (AUMF) Cohort 3.0, an initiative of the African Union Commission’s Information and Communication Directorate (ICD), today launched its Fireside Chat Series with a virtual session held on 4 May 2026 to commemorate World Press Freedom Day 2026 under the theme “Shaping a Future at Peace: Press Freedom, Journalism and the Pursuit of Human Rights in Africa.” The inaugural discussion brought together media

professionals and stakeholders to examine the state of press freedom on the continent, highlight challenges faced by journalists, and explore the role of independent media in advancing peace, human rights, and democratic governance in Africa.

Mr. Aziz Mshangama, representing the African Union Commission, opened the session by welcoming participants and emphasizing that World Press Freedom Day is a vital reminder of the role of a free and independent press in strengthening democracy, accountability, and citizen engagement across Africa. He highlighted that access to reliable information and the safety of journalists are central to achieving Agenda 2063, especially amid a rapidly evolving media landscape marked by digital transformation, misinformation, and growing challenges to media sustainability. He underscored the African Union Media Fellowship as a key initiative to strengthen journalism on the continent and called for honest dialogue on existing challenges while exploring innovative solutions to advance press freedom and responsible journalism in Africa.

Jeanne Lagarde, Sub-Saharan Africa Advocacy Officer at Reporters Without Borders (RSF), underscored the worsening state of press freedom in the region, noting that journalists in many countries face threats such as arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and prosecution simply for doing their work. She emphasized that a “future at peace” for journalists begins with ensuring their safety and freedom, calling on states to strengthen legal protections, end impunity for crimes against journalists, and rebuild public trust in the media through transparency and independence.

Mr. Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director of the International Press Centre (IPC), noted the growing gap between the ideal of press freedom and the reality faced by journalists, highlighting persistent repression, politically motivated attacks, and weak accountability. He stressed that despite constitutional guarantees, journalists continue to face intimidation from both state and non-state actors, underscoring the urgent need for stronger protections and an enabling environment for independent journalism.

The discussion highlighted that security crises significantly worsen access to reliable information, as journalists face threats, censorship, restricted movement, and in some cases targeted attacks, leading to information blackouts in conflict areas. It was noted that state and non-state actors often use propaganda and disinformation to shape narratives, a challenge amplified by social media, which accelerates the spread of false information and erodes public trust. However, participants pointed to growing fact-checking initiatives as important tools to counter misinformation and strengthen information integrity.

On the question of progress, it was emphasized that meaningful improvement requires a shift from normalization of attacks on journalists to concrete action, including stronger respect for media freedom and the establishment of a national mechanism for the safety and protection of journalists. Such a mechanism would bring together state institutions, security agencies, civil society, and media actors, and focus on prevention, protection, and prosecution to ensure accountability and safeguard press freedom, particularly in sensitive contexts such as elections.

Important Note:

As the Fireside Chat Series continues, participants are invited to look forward to Episode 2, scheduled for 25 May on Africa Day, which will focus on “Governance and Elections,” exploring the role of media in strengthening democratic processes, electoral integrity, and accountable governance across the continent.

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