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PRESS STATEMENT TO MARK WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2024

Sustainable Public Service Journalism Key to Democracy and Environmental Health

As we mark the 31st World Press Freedom Day under the theme “A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the Face of the Environmental Crisis,” the Namibia Media Trust (NMT) stands firmly on the foundation laid by the 1991 Windhoek Declaration – born in our capital – and a cornerstone of independent and pluralistic media, crucial for a healthy democracy. But today we also look to the future, guided by the Windhoek+30 Declaration, which reminds us that information is a public good, and essential for tackling environmental challenges.

We recognize that sustainable journalism is about more than just survival; it’s about a thriving press that innovatively adapts to the complexities of our times. This includes protecting environmental journalists who courageously expose environmental injustices and hold the powerful to account. Their work is more crucial than ever in ensuring that those in power are scrutinized and environmental wrongdoings are exposed. Particularly in Namibia, the developments in extractive industries, especially in oil, gas, and green hydrogen, demand critical examination of their impacts on affected communities and sustainable environmental practices. Optimal transparency is essential, and Namibia would benefit from confirming its membership in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) to ensure open and accountable management of its oil, gas, and mineral resources.

All around us, we witness the erosion of press freedom and, tragically, the loss of life among those who have devoted themselves to the cause of independent, public interest journalism. We particularly pay tribute to the courageous journalists in Palestine and their long-suffering families, those in Ukraine, the Sahel region, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Cameroon, among others. These journalists have faced profound risks and paid the ultimate price in their relentless pursuit to uncover the truth and inform the public.

As we move into 2024 and 2025, years that are marked by significant electoral activities across various regions, the challenges for journalists covering these events are expected to intensify. There is an urgent need to redefine our values as African journalists and be unequivocally clear about our standards and the quality of news and information we produce. This journalism must not only meet professional standards but also reflect the real-life challenges and aspirations of African peoples.

Moreover, it is crucial that we converge through our values on issues affecting the media sector. This convergence is essential for advancing a collective approach to advocacy and action, aiming to strengthen the capacity and safety of journalists as they navigate increasingly complex political landscapes. By doing so, we can ensure that the media remains a pivotal force in shaping democratic processes and providing a platform for diverse voices and perspectives across the continent.

In this era where journalism is often under threat, our commitment to these principles is more important than ever. It is only through such solidarity and adherence to rigorous journalistic standards that we can hope to protect the integrity of our profession and the safety of those who dare to speak truth to power.

On this World Press Freedom Day, the NMT calls upon journalists, policymakers, and the public to embrace the principles of sustainable journalism. By committing to protect, educate, and empower, we honour the legacy of the Windhoek Declaration and the Windhoek+30 Declaration. Together, let us ensure that our journalism not only survives but thrives as a force for good, safeguarding our planet and democratic values for future generations.

And finally, on this day, we once again pay tribute to former President Hage G. Geingob's commitment to press freedom. As we approach the impending presidential elections, his legacy reminds us of the crucial role that a free press plays in ensuring fair and informed electoral processes. This aligns perfectly with this year's theme for World Press Freedom Day, emphasizing the need for journalism that upholds the public interest and sustains democracy amidst global challenges.

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