

A WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE OFFICER-IN-CHARGE OF UNESCO ABUJA, PROF HASSANA ALIDOU, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2013 WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY WORKSHOP OPENING CEREMONY HELD ON THURSDAY, MAY 2, 2013 AT THE ROCKVIEW ROYALE HOTEL, ABUJA.

It gives me pleasure to stand before this distinguished assembly of the fourth estate of the realm, representatives of security and allied agencies as well as the civil societies who have gathered in support of freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

Before I go further, please permit me to thank Mr President, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan for the Freedom of Information Act, 2011. This singular act demonstrates that Nigeria is committed to press freedom. It is a major development in the democratic process of any nation. Free press and public access to information are part of the indices for measuring a thriving democracy.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, safety of the entire citizenry is dear to every government. That is the reason why the constitution provides such protection. However, safety of journalists attracts so much attention because of the danger they are exposed to in the course of their professional practice. Little wonder, there are international, regional and national instruments that protect journalists. They are also protected in Nigeria through a number of legal instruments including the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

May I at this point, call on the society to be more tolerant of the journalism profession? They should see journalists as partners in progress and as stakeholders in the development of Nigeria. There is need for all to understand that Nigerian journalists have a constitutional

mandate (Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution) to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people. They need the support of all in this respect.

The fundamental role played by journalists in the functioning of societies make them deserve special protection since violations to their rights also entail violations of others' rights to access knowledge.

Let us help them to perform their roles of bringing government activities to the people and bringing peoples' opinion to the attention of the government. A society where the press is free and safe is also a society where the people are free and governance is democratic. Just as other professionals (such as Doctors, Lawyers, Police, Military, Public servants, Bankers, Engineers, etc) are not attacked because they are practising their professions, journalists too, do not deserve to be attacked and molested just because they are carrying out their duties.

However, it should be well noted that journalists too should also be committed to ethical journalism. They should not denigrate the profession by throwing ethics to the wind and elevating personal interests well and above public interest. Every profession is guided by rules and regulations, it, therefore, behoves on the leadership of the professional bodies to ensure ethics are adhered to while erring practitioners are sanctioned appropriately. Similarly, bad eggs in the profession should be identified and expelled, to safe the integrity of journalism and its practitioners

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), I welcome you all and wish you fruitful deliberation.

