

JOINT STATEMENT BY GJA, GIBA, MFWA AND PRINPAG DELIVERED BY ALBERT KWABENA DWUMFOUR, PRESIDENT OF THE GHANA JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION, AT A NEWS CONFERENCE ON MEDIA BLACKLIST ON HAWA KOOMSON AND ATTACK ON CITI FM CORRESPONDENT AT YENDI, AT THE GHANA INTERNATIONAL PRESS CENTRE, ON TUESDAY FEBRUARY 6, 2024

Members of the National Executive of the GJA,
The representative of GIBA,
The representative of PRINPAG,
The representative of MFWA,
Colleague media practitioners,
Distinguished invited guests,
Ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the National Executives of the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), I welcome you to today's press conference. Let me reiterate our appreciation to you for your continuous support to the GJA, PRINPAG, GIBA and MFWA in our efforts at championing the rights and interests of journalists and other media practitioners in the country.

We commend all media houses who are walking the path with us by observing our earlier media blacklist decision. For the media houses and journalists who are going contrary to the call, we can only say we live to see and time will tell.

Colleagues, we are thankful for the overwhelming feedback and solidarity from everyone.

I am equally grateful to our partners; Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association, GIBA, Private Newspapers and Online News Publishers Association of Ghana, PRINPAG and Media Foundation for West Africa, MFWA for the continuous collaborative works aimed at ensuring that journalism in this country is accorded its rightful place among all professions and that journalists' inalienable rights and roles as enshrined in the Constitution are upheld at all times. Remember we form the Fourth Estate.

Let me also, welcome our Northern Regional Chairman from Tamale, Abdul-Majeed Yakubu, and the Management Team from Citi FM/TV and the Northern Regional Correspondent of Citi FM, Mohammed Amin Alabira to today's Press Conference.

Colleagues, on 8th and 25th of January, 2024 respectively, we held a press conference and registered our concerns and condemned the attack on the Cape FM Morning Show Host, David Kobenna, on Thursday, 4th January, 2024, at the Central Regional vetting of parliamentary aspirants of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), held at the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) by some thugs numbering about 15 and wearing a branded T-shirt of Mavis Hawa Koomson, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Awutu-Senya East.

We enumerated a number of demands. To press home our demands, Colleagues, we sent petitions to the NPP, both at the national and regional levels, and the Ghana Police Service. In view of the extremely cold silence of the NPP and the Police on the case, after our earlier demands, and after extensive consultation, we escalated our actions.

Just yesterday, Madam Mavis Hawa Koomson reached out and asked to meet with us to get the issue resolved and those who attacked David sanctioned. She has now shown interest in the case and willing to engage. So we will engage her and others to find closure to the case. We are waiting!

Colleagues, just as we try to handle the unresolved David Kobenna's attack case as you may be aware, another one occurred on Saturday January 27, 2024 at the NPP Parliamentary aspirants contest at Yendi, in the Northern Region where a Citi FM/TV Correspondent Mohammed Amin Alabira was assaulted.

This time not just the marauding thugs seeking a journalist to devour who perpetrated the act, but the Member of Parliament (MP) for Yendi, Alhaji Farouk Aliu Mahama was the one who led the onslaught. He slapped and kicked Alabira for attempting to do his work. His action invited his vigilantes around him who also pounced on the journalist and attacked him. His phone got damaged in the attack and he could not sleep for days because of the physical harm and psychological trauma that he experienced.

Colleagues, it is instructive to state here that Alabira was not the only one attacked, the Regional Police Commander, and the Electoral Commission Officer, were also made to undergo humiliating ordeals which no reasonable person and honourable Member of Parliament should engage in, but that was the case in Yendi. The MP and his thugs took the law into their own hands and engaged in unfathomable conducts that all well-meaning citizens must condemn and demand justice.

The GJA, GIBA, PRINPAG and MFWA are really shocked that after a week of this dastardly gangstarism no arrest has been made when the Regional Police Commander also tasted the ruthless actions of the thugs.

Colleagues, where have we reached as a country? For a journalist to be attacked, a senior police officer and EC official to be taken hostage in a bus after the chaos for hours only for the Military to come to their rescue and till date no arrest has been made. This should tell us that if care is not taken, this year's election will be bloody.

Political parties and response to attacks on us.

Colleagues, though our intel suggested an orchestrated attack on the media before, during, and after election 2024, we least expect the deafening silence from high profile party bigwigs and persons who are at the helm of affairs at the Regional and National levels. We do not want to believe that they endorse the behaviour of the "professional troublemakers" in their party. After two of our colleagues have been attacked during their primaries, no senior member of the NPP leadership has reached out and condemned the attacks.

Incidents of Attack on Journalists and police lack of interest

Just within one month in this year alone two of our colleagues have been attacked without any provocation. Last year within the last quarter more than ten journalists were assaulted. Apart from the attacks, our records also show that from 2021 to date, four journalists spent days behind bars on the orders of the court for no apparent legal reasons. All these cases have not seen any closure and the perpetrators are free while the law enforcing agency, the Police seemingly looks on unconcerned.

Colleagues, we have come to the conclusion that the Ghana Police Service has failed to live up to our expectations when it comes to issues relating to the media. Are they not supposed to protect us? If our safety is at stake, how do we defend our constitutional mandate and contribute to the development of this country?

We keenly observe the swiftness with which the police arrest journalists at the instance of politicians and public officers, and yet hardly get the perpetrators of attacks on journalists charged. Unfortunately, the few who were recently charged in the case of attacks on Radio Dagbon and UTV were left off with paltry fines. It does appear that press offenses are more grievous to the establishment than offenses against the press. These attacks by vigilantes make us wonder if truly there is a ban on vigilante activities in this country.

The Police Service led by IGP Dr. Dampare should demonstrate the willingness to fight for the safety of journalists across the country. We entreat the Ministry of Information to help us in this fight. We are aware the Ministry has been trying its best with programmes aimed at ensuring the protection of the media, but we require the Ministry to do more. We are yet to see a statement from the Ministry on the Yendi and the Cape Coast case. This is rather unusual since it started issuing statements condemning such acts.

Threat of suing GJA and attacked journalists

My Colleagues, just like Madam Mavis Hawa Koomson, Farouk Aliu Mahama has also threatened to go to court over this assault case. How on earth would a perpetrator of a condemnable and shameful act rather be threatening to sue? This can only happen in Ghana where politicians with ballooned egos will be issuing empty threats after they have committed a crime. This is akin to adding

insult to injury. After blatantly attacking the reporter in broad daylight and on live TV, he is threatening court action on allegations of defamation. It appears there is a sense of impunity that gives these public officials the impression that they can attack or cause an attack on journalists and media personnel and get away with it. We want to say it here and now, that we cannot be cowed and intimidated with such load of hot-air threats. The courts are not in the bosom of any politician for them to think that their negative acts will be condoned by the courts.

The Judiciary

Ladies and Gentlemen, we equally want the courts in Ghana to demonstrate their commitment to upholding freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. In this regard, we wish to appeal to the judiciary to issue more deterrent convictions for hoodlums who attack journalists.

A plea to Speaker of Parliament

We would like to call on the Speaker of Parliament, Right Honourable Speaker, Alban Sumana Bagbin to intervene in the Yendi case and haul the MP to the appropriate Parliamentary Committee to respond to his unhonourable behaviour.

Colleagues, we are happy that Parliament reconvenes today and we expect the Leadership of the House to take action to reprimand the Honourable MP for Yendi, Farouk Aliu Mahama.

Now our resolution and demands regarding the attack on the Citi FM journalist are as follows;

1. That all media houses must BLACKLIST and offer Farouk Aliu Mahama no media coverage, interview, etc. as the MP for Yendi and any other state position he holds until further notice. We want you to know that apart from him been insensitive to the work of journalists (as demonstrated during the Parliamentary Primaries), there are vigilantes around him who may harm you. So, just steer clear of him and his thugs.
2. The NPP leadership at the National and Regional levels must seek justice for our colleague, Mohammed Amin Alabira by sanctioning the MP and his hoodlums appropriately;
3. The Ghana Police Service should speed up with investigations into the case and arraign the perpetrators before court to face the full rigours of the law for their distasteful conduct. This time the policemen and women are witnesses to the incident as it happened.
4. We are giving the NPP, Regional and National, and the Ghana Police Service ten (10) days ultimatum each to hear from them. They should arrest the perpetrators. If they fail, we shall advise ourselves.

My Colleagues, it is our hope that all media houses will rally behind our call and ensure that they adhere to the directives. This is in our shared interest.

Any media house which violates the BLACKLIST declaration believing that their staff will not be attacked and goes ahead to offer their platforms to Farouk Aliu Mahama, the blood of any journalist who will be killed during this period will be on the head of owners and management of such media houses.

If we had taken action in the past, we are sure Ahmed Suale would have been alive today. Never again! Never again!

Colleagues, let us also do well to avoid actions that will make unreasonable politicians and their assigns attack us.

May God strengthen us in our bond and dedication to the cause of journalists and the media in times like this.

Long live GJA, GIBA, PRINPAG and MFWA.

Thank you for your attention.