



Committee to Protect Journalists

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CPJ's 2020 Award Acceptance Speech

As delivered November 19, 2020

A Journalism of Freedom and Community

Two months from now, it will be exactly 2 years since the Ghanaian investigative journalist Ahmed Suale was brutally murdered in the presence of his young child. It will be one year since Dadiyata, the Nigerian blogger, also went missing. And as I speak to you today, 27 of our colleagues are in jail in Egypt, not to talk of the conditions that journalism faces in countries like Mali, even in South Africa, in Zimbabwe, and definitely in Tanzania. The state of press freedom in Africa today is abysmal and extremely frightening.

The modest progress that Africa has made in the past decade is in great threat. Yet we cannot lose sight of the fact that Africa needs a very strong and reliable press. The fact that two-thirds of the global maternal mortality is recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa and also that 27 of the 28th poorest countries where poverty is about 30 percent on a global scale is in Sub-Saharan Africa should remind us of the very difficult work that we need to do both in development and democracy building.^[1] For Africa to be able to pull through this difficult environment of the 21st century we need bold imagination, we need a space for debate, we need a context for dissent, we need more marchers on the street, but above all we need an asset of democracy that helps us interpret and mediate these processes in a way that no other institution can.

If you look at the four crippling conditions, the vestiges of authoritarianism, the terrible economic situation, the new growth of a climate of fear swelled by disinformation sometimes promoted by governments, now add the new leveler, COVID-19. All this reminds us, and should serve as a huge warning that the last thing that we need to do is to now shut down dissent. We need an unfettered press to be able to narrate these processes in a way that can lead us to resolutions.

Accordingly, an International Press Freedom Award at this moment awakens the mind. It reminds me in particular, and I believe many of my colleagues, of the very important work that remains undone in the development of our media and the struggle to expand and give true consequence to our democracy. But above all, to give true definition to the reign of human rights and liberties in all countries of the region.

It is in that regard that I therefore dedicate this award to all our colleagues who are still languishing in jail in the region. It is to remind them that freedom's day is just the next day away.

Thank you very much and God bless.

^[1] [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality;](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality)
[https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2018/11/21/figure-of-the-week-understanding-poverty-in-africa/#:~:text=As%20of%202015%2C%20most%20of,Saharan%20Africa%20\(Figure%201\).&text=The%20average%20poverty%20rate%20for,poverty%20rate%20above%2030%20percent.](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2018/11/21/figure-of-the-week-understanding-poverty-in-africa/#:~:text=As%20of%202015%2C%20most%20of,Saharan%20Africa%20(Figure%201).&text=The%20average%20poverty%20rate%20for,poverty%20rate%20above%2030%20percent.)