



# **REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

## **MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY**

**SPEECH BY MR JOE MUCHERU EGH, MBS, CABINET SECRETARY  
FOR INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY DURING  
THE 2<sup>ND</sup> KENYA EDITORS' GUILD CONVENTION ON THURSDAY 5<sup>TH</sup>  
DECEMBER 2019 AT THE TRAVELLERS BEACH RESORT IN  
MOMBASA COUNTY**

**The President, Editors Guild, The Chairman, Media Council of Kenya**

**Eric Kneedler, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the United States of America,**

**The CEO, Standard Group, Editors, Media Managers, International Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen**

1) I am happy to join you today at this 2<sup>nd</sup> Kenya Editors' Guild Annual Convention, just as I journeyed with you in the first convention held in Nairobi last year.

- 2) Today, we will share our thoughts on the developments in media and possible solutions to the challenges we are experiencing in our sector.
- 3) Before I proceed, I have learnt that we have guests from Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States. **Karibuni Kenya** – as we say here, which means **‘Welcome to Kenya’**. Kenya is a world athletic power house and the land of Eliud Kipchoge, who broke the full marathon barrier by completing the race in under 2 hours. Kenya is also feted as the cradle of mankind and a country rich in wildlife heritage – the real black panther was actually spotted in Laikipia County,

4) It is my hope and trust that when you go back, you will use your media outlets to share our valued stories, our heritage and the unique opportunities offered by Kenya

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

5) Similar to the first convention held in Nairobi last year, this convention comes at a time when the media is faced by many challenges. Media houses are concerned about falling circulation figures and the decline in revenue from advertising, associated with the emerging trends of fragmented audiences and a slow pace in the adoption of innovation.

- 6) Similarly, there have been concerns among citizens about editorial interference by some media owners, the political class and commercial interest groupings. Additionally, during the period, we have witnessed an increase in defamation cases, which have seen the courts giving punitive awards for damages.
- 7) From these few examples, it is clear that the need for reforms in the media ecosystem is necessary, to make the outlets vibrant to enable them play their watch dog role in the society. These challenges, if left unaddressed, can be a threat to democracy and a free society because there is need to have a strong media to keep check on democratic institutions and facilitate access to information by

citizens. There is need for the media to also explore alternative revenue streams to sustain their operations.

## **Ladies and gentlemen**

- 8) Technology has disrupted the traditional mode of media operation. This can be viewed as a threat to media caused but the good news is that technology provides great opportunity to media practitioners to innovate.
- 9) Technology has brought convenience to audiences; one can view, listen to and read what they want, where and when they want it. Smart media houses have taken advantage of this enabling type of technology to build vast and loyal digital audiences.

- 10) For many publications, their online readership is much higher than their reach in the offline space. Therefore, when companies experience low revenues, it is not because audiences are not consuming content.
- 11) The reality is that the audience has gravitated online. Why? Is it because most of the content is free or cheap and the platforms, such as smartphones, more convenient? I encourage our media practitioners to see how best they can take advantage of online platforms to generate revenue.
- 12) At this stage I would like to challenge you the editors;
  - a) What kind of unique content can our media sell online to take advantage of the huge readership there?

- b) Can our media find a balance between the negative journalism of lamentations, to one that offers solutions to the problems experienced by our communities?
- 13) Looking at the theme and programme of this convention, I am happy to note that we may find answers to these questions right here. I have noted that the sessions coming up will interrogate critical issues such as:
- a) The constitutional role of media, the commercial vs editorial priorities of media houses,
  - b) the opportunities to be found in social media, and
  - c) the very current topic of the telling of the African story.

- 14) I also see training sessions on leading change and innovation in the media, in addition to reflecting on what is necessary to build successful newsrooms in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These are sessions that get to the crux of quality journalism and how we can benefit as a country from good journalistic practices.
- 15) Kenya's Constitution (2010), through Articles 34 and 35, enshrines the protection of media freedoms, and access to information by the media and citizens of this country. As government we commit to continue updating policy and regulatory frameworks to attract and protect the investments and operations of the media industry.

- 16) We will continue to work with media stakeholders and parliament to formulate progressive legal and policy initiatives to further support our media.
- 17) However, we also call upon media owners to employ professional journalists and re-train their staff to promote adherence to the code of conduct and ethical values in the media industry.
- 18) There is also the need for the media owners to observe the labour laws during recruitment of correspondents. There have been concerns over poor remuneration of correspondents that compromise their work ethic.

## **Ladies and gentlemen**

- 19) In an attempt to improve the quality of journalism in the country and strengthen the media industry, the government enacted the Media Council of Kenya Act (2013), that provided for a co-regulation framework that enabled the media industry and the Government to jointly set up the Media Council of Kenya.
- 20) There have been murmurs over the independence of the Council because of the government representation. If it is the feeling of the media fraternity that the Council need to have complete independence, then we are ready to engage on the matter.

- 21) As mentioned above, some of the problems the media faces, such as punitive defamation fines, are self-inflicted due to failure to adhere to the code of ethics.
- 22) We are aware the Guild has proposed reforms aimed at creating an effective and efficient office of a Media Ombudsman to arbitrate on media issues and efforts to make the Media Council of Kenya an independent constitution Commission to inspire broader confidence.
- 23) The Guild has also proposed the need for investing innovatively in advertising revenue for media sustainability and improving professionalism among other proposals. I believe a consensus will be reached on the proposals after a broader debate.

24) As I conclude, my Ministry will support the reforms because we owe the citizens a service that delivers to them credible and relevant information. On litigation which is one of the biggest threats to journalism, the Media Ombudsman (Complaints Commission of the Media Council of Kenya) should be the first port of call.

25) This way, the arbitration will be done to ensure that deserved penalties to journalistic omissions and commissions are done without undermining our commitment to media diversity. Even the small media houses must be allowed to survive, thrive and grow without excusing professional negligence.

**With those remarks. I wish you all a productive convention and a happy Jamhuri Day and blessed festive season ahead!**