



Organization of African Unity
The Secretary General

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9 August 1995

Chairman,
African Journalist of the Year Award,
Kumasi, Ghana.
Fax no. : 217244/337538

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF OAU,
H.E. Dr. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
TO PARTICIPANTS AT FIRST AFRICAN JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR AWARD,

11 August 1995, Kumasi, Ghana.

On the occasion of the First African Journalist of the Year Award, I wish to welcome this happy initiative and to register my deep appreciation to the sponsors and organisers for making this event possible. It is a measure and recognition of the importance they attach to the ever increasing role being played by journalists in Africa and their determination to encourage high professional standards. We, in the OAU, are appreciative of this encouragement.

We welcome the initiative more so when Africa is in a transition ; transition to a stable and democratic political environment and a transition to socio-economic development. Africa's future depends on how we manage the transition. The role of the African journalist is beset by many obstacles and problems that his Western counterpart does not face. Lack of resources and facilities, inadequate possibilities for training, harassment and sometimes arrests and detention are some of the obstacles that face



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the African Journalist. This is not to say that the African jouranalists have been without their own shortcomings. They have at times exhibited a penchant for sensational and inflammatory reporting.

It is my conviction that all these are teething problems on the road to democracy and media freedom. Our journalists should however understand that this freedom cannot come on a silver platter, even if it is constitutionally guaranteed. In most cases, it calls for a hard struggle, and it has to be earned. The African journalist therefore, like all his other compatriots, has to observe vigilance to guarantee freedom. With regard to maintenance of high professional standards, the African journalists should consider as a matter of urgency the adoption of a Code of Conduct for all its members.

All these are necessary to enable the African journalists play the crucial role expected of them during the transition period. The unique facility at the disposal of the journalist places him at the forefront of developments in a society, especially a society that is in the process of change. As Africa is a continent in transition, we expect our journalists to play a leading role in guiding this transition.

In the area of democratization, in addition to their normal duties, we expect our journalists to assist in the civic education of the population and promoting continental unity, while respecting our diversity. The African journalist should not only be a watchdog of our newly won freedom, he or she should promote the rights of our peoples at all time.



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Our States are making strenuous efforts at socio-economic transformation against the backdrop of a harsh international climate. Our journalists should give more scope to the developmental efforts and present Africa in its true colors.

The world is indeed increasingly becoming a global village. The CNN International, for example, by its coverage of world events and bringing the news as they happen to our living rooms and bedrooms, has dramatically demonstrated this. We have quite often made the plea for fair and balanced reporting of events in Africa. We still continue to make the plea. This is also a challenge to the African journalist who needs to be assisted and encouraged so as to serve Africa and humanity better.

I look forward to the era of vibrant journalism in Africa as much as I look forward to the consolidation of the democratic culture in the continent. Please convey our hearty congratulations to the recipients of the awards. Similarly, we wish to extend our warmest felicitations to the CNN International on the occasion of its Tenth Anniversary of service to mankind and express the hope that succeeding Anniversaries would witness more scope being given to the coverage of events in Africa. To the Safara Magazine, we commend them for the organization that has gone into the event, and hope that this would become a permanent feature in Africa.

Salim Ahmed Salim.