

1 May 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the World Press Freedom Day**

**Excellencies,
Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

2015 has been a particularly significant year for the fundamental principles of press freedom.

As Member States assess the state of press freedom around the world, it should be recalled that this year started with a heinous and brutal crime against a member of the media community.

The terrorist attack against the satirical newspaper, Charlie Hebdo in early January, drew strong condemnation from around the world, including from me, as President of the General Assembly.

On that occasion, I reiterated that freedom of expression and freedom of press are fundamental rights and essential pillars of democratic societies and good governance. On the part of governments, every effort should be made to ensure that journalists can do their work in safe and enabling environments and those crimes against them are prosecuted.

On its part, the press and media fraternity has an obligation to ensure fairness, impartiality and objectivity in the conduct of its day-to-day work. Once this done, we, the international community, must defend the media from attacks on their independence with steadfast determination. We must also pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty. Sadly, too many continue to pay a heavy price, sometimes making the ultimate sacrifice, for their work.

In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly established that each May, we will celebrate World Press Freedom Day. Some 22 years later, we have gathered here today to express our utmost respect to the many courageous men and women who brave hazardous terrain and dangerous environments to tell the important stories the world needs to hear.

These men and women go about their critical work in often inhospitable environments. From the comfort and safety of our homes and workplaces, we can learn about important issues around the world, including some dark and troubling events.

Journalists bridge the information gap. Through their work, we learn about important discoveries and innovations shaping our world. Without them, we would have difficulty knowing about positive developments in the furthest corners of the world. In the same way, we would never hear the cries that are being silenced or the injustices being committed. We may never know of abuses being perpetrated, hostages being taken or lives brutally stolen.

Excellencies,

Already this year, more than 40 journalists and media staff have been killed around the world. Many more are being held hostage. Others have simply disappeared. Countless have been injured, harassed, intimidated or arbitrarily thrown in jail.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is clear: the freedom for all to seek, receive and impart information, regardless of borders should not be tampered with. I urge all Member States to do their utmost to uphold these rights for the press and media staff. We must strive to guarantee these universal standards.

Member States, international and regional organizations, corporations and other entities must promote and enable an environment that is safe for media organizations and their employees to operate freely, without fear of intimidation or harassment.

In a year that has already witnessed so much violence and extremism, an independent press and press freedoms constitute a defining challenge.

Indeed, these are basic human rights we must strive to achieve and uphold each and every day, around the world.

I thank you.