

President of Kenya urges media to be objective

The president of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki has challenged the media to demonstrate objectivity, balance and sensitivity in news coverage, particularly in the period of competitive politics in the country, in the countdown to the general elections, taking place in 2013.

President Kibaki said the media, through their coverage of political activities, was duty-bound to spearhead peace initiatives that enhance national cohesion and integration.

Speaking during the official opening, yesterday 2 May 2012, of the three-day East African Journalists Convention at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC) in Nairobi, the president pointed out Kenyans' expectations of the media to play its educative and informative roles in Kenya and Africa.

"As we approach the forthcoming elections, we expect the media to be at the forefront in informing and educating Kenyans on various electoral matters so that they can make informed choices of leaders," said the head of state.

Kibaki expressed his concern over the vulgar talk on some radio programmes and obscene scenes on television during family viewing time. He appealed to the Media Council of Kenya and other relevant agencies to provide leadership by discouraging negative and immoral content and instead promote positive and intellectual programmes that were of value to the audience.

Shaping attitudes

The president also challenged the African media to help sell the continent to the world by reporting on the continent's beauty, the resilience of the people, economic transformation and the deep cultural attributes.

He reminded African journalists that their reporting on the positive side of the continent would shape the attitudes, biases and opinions of the international media.

"Always bear this in mind because we need to start preparing the world for the days ahead, as Africa slowly but surely begins taking its rightful place on the international platform. Help the world capture the true picture of this significant moment. This will be your contribution to Africa since you are the first chronicle of history he observed.

He pledged continued government support to media freedom guided by fair and responsible reporting as outlined in the country's new constitution.

Media urged to exercise their freedoms responsibly

President Kibaki praised the Kenyan media for being among the most vibrant in the world with diversity of content, plurality of ownership and cultural materials that socialise people to take responsibility in nation building.

On social media, the head of state urged users of new media across the continent to exercise their freedoms responsibly and use such platforms to promote development, peace and cohesion.

"Our young people should especially view new media as modern empowering tools and not avenues to corrupt their morals", he observed.

Pillars for a free democratic society

Terming media freedom, freedom of expression and access to information as necessary pillars for a free democratic society, the president encouraged the convention to interrogate through opening discussions ; major issues that are relevant for the continent.

"The convergence of press freedom and freedom of expression, through various traditional as well as new media, has given rise to an extraordinary level of media freedom. It has enabled citizens to bring about massive social and political transformations," he said.

The state of ICT

Observing that information and telecommunications technology has enabled the diffusion of vital information to a large number of people in a very short span of time, president Kibaki noted with gratitude that Kenya is ranked second on the African continent in the use of the social networking site, Twitter with Facebook users in approaching two million.

This rapid growth of technology use, the head of state stated, promised to transform and enable the emergence of new ways to communicate, share information and knowledge, and for people to widen their sense of participation, identity and belonging.

With regard to access to information as a prerequisite to media freedom, Kibaki reassured that the government as the custodian of public information would ensure relevant information including public spending was made accessible to the media.