

Campaign launched to fight hate speech in African media

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Delegates at a two-day media forum on hate speech in Kigali late last week have launched a continental campaign against hate speech to put media houses at the centre of fighting the vice and promoting peace.



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A declaration launching the campaign was endorsed and published at the end of the forum by media leaders and top journalists from around the continent, as well as some global organisations involved in promoting media ethics.

Signatories to the 'Kigali Declaration,' as it was dubbed, include the Rwanda Journalists Association, World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, Ugandan Journalists' Union, Association of Rwandan Female Journalists, African Editors' Forum, Federation of African Journalists, International Association of Women in Radio and Television, and the Institute for Democracy and Education in Media.

"We declare our support for the launch of an unprecedented campaign, 'Turning the Page of Hate Media in Africa', with the aim of promoting ethical, tolerant and inclusive journalism, good media governance and responsible communications across the open information landscape," the declaration reads in part.

Burden of internet

More than 150 delegates at the forum have also urged its organisers to establish a framework for the operation and development of the campaign including the preparation of materials and activities to the benefit of journalism in Africa.

The forum noted that among primary victims of intolerance and discrimination are women and people from minority communities, whose portrayal in media is often demeaning and stereotypical.

It also recognised that rapid expansion of internet access in Africa is welcome, but begs an urgent need to promote

responsible use of information online and counter hate speech.

"We urge all media professional groups at national and regional level and across all platforms of journalism in Africa to raise awareness of the ethical challenges set out here and to strengthen editorial work in line with the objectives of the campaign," the declaration says.

Setting the agenda

The meeting was organised by Rwanda's Media High Council, the Ethical Journalism Network and the African Media Initiative.

UK-based journalist, Aidan White, the director of the Ethical Journalism Network, a global campaign promoting good governance and ethical conduct in media, has hope that the campaign will make a difference.

"A declaration can't have teeth unless the people who are making it are prepared to do something about putting it into effect. But this declaration is unique because it's the first time that African media professionals themselves - without the influence of governments or NGOs - have agreed to take on the job of trying to make this work," White said.

Follow-up activities in line with spreading the campaign will be organised in different capitals in Africa.

The Government of Rwanda has also pledged to support the organisation of a media dialogue against hate speech every year as part of events held to mark the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi.

"I think it can make a difference by bringing the voice of journalists into discussions about media policy and how the media operates," White said.

First step in the right direction

Uganda Journalists Union President Lucy Anyango Ekadu said such a campaign was long overdue. "Everything begins with one step. There is a saying that Rome was not built in one day. So, it's one step at a time and I think this declaration is the first step in the right direction," she said.

Gonzaga Muganwa, the executive secretary of the Rwanda Association of Journalists, said all journalists need to be agents of peace to be aware of their ability to influence what is being done in their communities.

"We have the potential and tools to disseminate the good resolutions out of this dialogue. The message should be able to reach all the journalists on the continent," Muganwa said.

He also urged coordination and communication among different bodies that represent journalists across Africa.

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