

Sirleaf vows to uphold free speech

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President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf says her government has no plans to arrest any journalist, shut down radio stations or ban newspapers. "We will not burn down media houses or intimidate critics", she said in a prepared speech on Saturday, 12 January 2013.

"We will not arrest journalists or silence political commentators, even if, aware of their own transgressions, they expect us to do so," she added.

President Sirleaf said further that her government's decision not to go after its critics is not a sign of weakness but that she and her officials were not just ready to "dishonor the stripes " which they have earned by "years of personal sacrifices and political struggles," suggesting that journalists and critics can go ahead and say what they want, her government will not just mind them.

"...we are increasingly aware of the many abuses of press freedom, and the obvious disrespect for the associated responsibility in the exercise of that freedom, the measured responses of this government have and will continue to be for more freedom, more tolerance..."the president said.

The president's comments come in the wake of mounting public criticisms and negative media coverage of her government most of which has to do with failure to take actions against government officials said to be her friends.

A most recent example is the finding of the committee on the Private User Permit or PUP in which agriculture minister, Florence Chenoweth failed to exercise due diligent. Other officials of the Forestry Development Authority linked to the report have been sacked, while the ministers of agriculture as well as Lands and Mines are still sitting pretty.

But she maintained, "This government is strong - strong enough to have responded to abuses of press freedom by enacting one of the best Freedom of Information Laws in the world so as to always protect and guarantee openness in governance and freedom of expressions in our country."

She said to demonstrate her government's strength further, it "proceeded to decriminalise media-related offenses in keeping with the Table Mountain Declaration".

"We will continue to open up the government, and to open up our society, to a healthy competition of ideas, whether such ideas are expressed in unreasonable criticisms, or as it is in some cases, unsubstantiated claims against the administration and its officials," she added.

However, the president said her government is committed to upholding the law and to respect the nation's traditional values.

"...where freedom is mischievously abused to the extent that it violates the rights of other citizens, it shall be the solemn obligation of this government - from which we will neither slumber nor hesitate - to willfully, dutifully and lawfully punish such abusers so as to uphold, defend and protect the rights of each citizen," she said.

Source: [allAfrica](#)

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