

ADDRESS GIVEN BY THE RT. HON. JUSTICE D.F. ANNAN
SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE
LAUNCHING OF THE NATIONAL MEDIA COMMISSION'S
GUIDELINES FOR POLITICAL REPORTING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY, 24TH APRIL, 1996

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

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The November, 1996 Elections are only a few months away. It is fitting, proper and timely therefore that the National Media Commission should introduce briefs for the occasion for the guidance of the media, political parties and the public which happen to be the main actors in the process and also the ultimate custodians of our growing democracy. This initiative taken by your Commission is in conformity with its constitutional responsibility to promote access to fair, accurate and comprehensive information on political issues so as to ensure that citizens make intelligent political decisions and also to give citizens fair and adequate opportunity to express divergent views in the run-up to free, fair and democratic elections.

2. The media as a whole plays an indispensable role in the formulation and expression of the public opinion which ultimately controls political parties and Governments short of assuming a command position over voters when they enter the polling booths. It is for this reason that strenuous and timely efforts must be made prior to polling day not only to provide citizens with the information and raw materials needed for a correct decision, but also create opportunities for all of them to express themselves freely within subject of court to law.

3. Going through the guidelines as outlined by the Commission, I noticed that painstaking efforts have gone into their preparation. I wish, however, to add that the various references made to the public media by way of recommendations with the view to achieving high level standards of journalism should equally apply to the private media. This will ensure balanced coverage in both media.

4. To my mind, reporting on the highest seats in the country, the Presidency, the Judiciary, Legislature and other Agencies of Government is an area where extreme care must be exercised. In the conduct of such delicate assignments objectivity, fairness, accuracy must be the watch words of media practitioners. The media should seek to ensure that the information fed to the public is assembled, edited and presented in a manner that, in general, would uphold the image and functions of the three branches of Government in our united effort to stabilise true democracy in Ghana.

5. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic and even before then, the Ghanaian media have enjoyed a high level of freedom. While admitting that Members of Government have been put on their toes as the media continued to play the role of watchdog, it must also be said that performance of certain papers particularly those of the private press have left much to be desired. It is against this background, and for the benefit of the country as a whole, that members of the media are urged to be fair, objective and circumspect in offering comments on public events and affairs.

6. The activities of political parties and what each of them has to offer to the country when elected must be brought to light in their manifestos to educate the electorate to make intelligent choice of

candidates for the Presidency and Parliament. This crucial role of the electorate will only be achieved if the reports are not clouded in biases, half truths and mendacity.

7. The Constitution also enjoins the Media in Article 163 to give fair and adequate opportunity for citizens to express their divergent views. This enables the reading public to make an input into the political system for the attention of the Government and other policy makers. In this respect, the right of the reader to an objective political report such as is expected in any party manifesto which enables him or her to make an independent, free, fair and objective assessment of developments in the political terrain is not negotiable. Thus integrity, credibility and objectivity must be the measuring rods in the assessment of the performance of the media particularly during the campaigns that precede elections. Also given the large number of people who cannot or will not read, the need for expanding other facilities like roads and electricity to the towns and villages in the country to maximise the reach of the electronic media is now more important than ever before. This is because democracy is all about people, their views and development - all of which can be achieved through the medium of education. Government's efforts at sending electricity and constructing good roads to various parts of the country underscore this fact. More FM Stations have now been opened in the cities and it is hoped such amenities would be extended to the rural areas in due course.

8. Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I now wish to congratulate the National Media Commission on the good work done in the production of the guidelines for the conduct of the impending elections.

For the first time in Ghana's political history a quasi-Government agency has, on its own volition, felt the urgent need to provide meaningful guidelines that spell out the manner in which our media, political parties and the public could interact in the conduct of political campaign that will precede our impending elections, to ensure their success. The relevance and importance of these guidelines to the political process cannot be under-estimated. Perhaps an additional concern of all Ghanaians should be the effective utilisation of the Commissions' guidelines to ensure a really smooth, peaceful and successful conduct of the impending presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana. This laudable aim will, no doubt, be achieved if officials of the media, political parties and a vigilant public act in concert with the Commission. To this end what is called for is effective monitoring of the application of the provisions of the guidelines during the pre-election political campaigns and processes. For this reason, the Commission may also strengthen its determination to foster good governance in the country by progressively reducing moral and allied lapses such as bribery and corruption that have been the bane of our past pre-election campaigns.

9. It is a fact that the Commission would find most of the provisions in its guidelines fairly easy to monitor during the period of implementation. Notable among these are the checking of the backgrounds of candidates for elections, the analyses, clarification and dissemination of information in various manifestos of political parties and the apportionment of equal time to various political parties for broadcasting, advertising and political gatherings. Provisions in guidelines relating to breaches of moral standards such as bribery and