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MEDIA FREEDOM UNDER SIEGE IN KENYA

FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE

NAIROBI, 20 JUNE 2023 – The civic society members under the umbrella of the Civic Freedoms Forum, note with concern the reckless and irresponsible statement made by Cabinet Secretary for Trade, Moses Kuria regarding media reporting on governance and accountability.

The Cabinet Secretary is reported to have made remarks that targeted the Nation Media Group, stating that the said media house needs to decide whether they are the opposition or the press. This statement was made during the Akorino Annual Convention held in Embu County. The CS is further reported to have threatened to sack government officers who would be found to have placed advertisements with the Nation Media Group.

It is disappointing to note that 12 years after the promulgation of a very progressive Bill of Rights within the Kenyan Constitution, rights are still treated as privileges. The freedom of the media is guaranteed under Article 34 of the Kenyan Constitution. The right is also guaranteed under regional and international human rights instruments ratified by Kenya, including, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (Banjul Charter) and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We, therefore, condemn, in the strongest terms possible, the actions and statement made by Moses Kuria and reiterate that it was in total disregard of his constitutional rights.

For the avoidance of doubt, the press is under no obligation to side with the government in reporting and dissemination of information. In fact, the Constitution, under Article 34(2) provides that the State shall not interfere with the press or penalize any person for an opinion, view or content of any broadcast, publication or dissemination.

We, therefore, call upon all government officials, and particularly the Cabinet Secretary for Trade, Moses Kuria:

- Desist from continued intimidation and harassment of the press and in this case Nation Media Group.
- Withdraw his statement and or threat of firing government employees who work with the Nation Media Group in advertising.
- Acknowledge and respect the Constitutional rights particularly the freedom of the media, freedom of expression and access to information.

We also call upon the Communication, Information and Innovation and Justice and Legal Affairs Committees of National Assembly to investigate the numerous, deliberate and calculated attacks on the media since last year's general elections, with a view to protecting of media freedoms in Kenya.

Signed by the following

1. Kenya Human Rights Commission - KHRC
2. Independent Medico Legal Unit - IMLU
3. Article 19 East Africa
4. Muslims for Human Rights - MUHURI
5. Defenders Coalition
6. Constitution and Reform Education Consortium - CRECO
7. Poverty Eradication Network – PEN
8. Initiative for Inclusive Empowerment - IIE
9. InformAction
10. Inuka Kenya Ni Sisi!