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2017 WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY (WPF) REMARKS BY THE JESUIT CENTRE FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION (JCTR) EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FR. LEONARD CHITI

The Minister of Justice, Honorable Given Lubinda
The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Zambia, Ms. Janet Rogan,
Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) Zambia Chapter Access to
Information (ATI), Ambassador, Reverend Dr. Suzanne M'membe-Matale,
2017 World Press Freedom Day Organizing Chairperson, Mr. Enock Ngoma,
Government officials present,
Members of the Press,
Distinguished invited guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Let me just say, All protocols observed.

I am delighted and honoured to be part of this year's World Press Freedom
celebrations commemorated annually on May 3rd.

Ladies and gentlemen, I strongly believe as a Fourth Estate a free media
cannot abdicate its critical role of contributing to the development of a
peaceful, prosperous and just society. It does this by among other things
providing information that can augment efforts by policy makers, development
practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders in advancing the cause of lifting
millions of people out of poverty.

"A Society where faith promotes justice for all in all spheres of life, especially for the poor"



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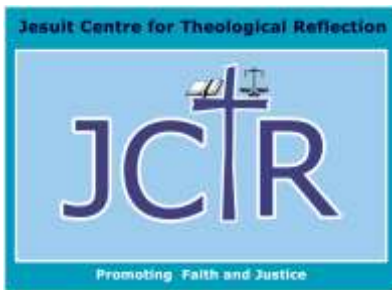
It seems to me that the Media, widely recognized as The Fourth Estate in addition to the Executive, the Judiciary and the legislature has a critical role to play in ensuring that information is provided to develop critical minds and in critical times. This obviously entails that members of the press report accurate and verified information. It also means that a free environment must exist for the press to operate freely to provide a service to the public in order to enhance the enjoyment of their basic rights of access to information and freedom of speech.

Ladies and gentlemen, this year's theme is, "Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media's role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies" is very apt in terms of engaging the dynamic and interesting times we live in today.

This year's theme also provides us with an opportunity to see how the media can contribute towards preparing critical minds to tackle critical development challenges. The media can support progress towards the attainment of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs).

As Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, we believe in the sanctity of a free press as it can also contribute towards enhancing social justice (a cardinal motivation of our work) which includes social cohesion and advancing good democratic tenets. Indeed, we live in critical times here in this country. No one can deny the political tensions prevailing at the minute and the economic challenges that we are going through. These times require committed men and women who execute their duties professionally without fear or favour.

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A day like today should accord each one of us an opportunity to assess our performance and contribution towards an informed, educated and critical public.

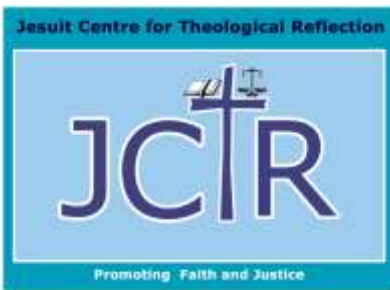
It is pleasing to note that being the conscience of society, the media practitioners are planning a visit to a prison on 20th May 2017, held an -Inter-company Sport Tournament on 29th April, a Media Workshop and a Media Award Dinner 5th May 2017 on among other planned activities. I also understand that this morning, the practitioners gallantly held a march past from Lusaka's Post Office to the Freedom Statue.

Let quickly offer a few quick comments in relation to the theme of this year's celebrations. In terms of peace, I quickly alluded to the fact that today we are experiencing some tensions arising out recent events of a political nature. It is the responsibility of the media to educate all of us about this situation in an accurate, responsible and impartial way so as to avoid our beloved nation losing its much cherished peace.

In terms of a just society, Let me refer to the words of a global leadership icon on the African Continent, Nelson Mandela, it is our shared belief that justice must not just be done but more importantly seen to be done. We therefore emphasize the need to stress positive messages by the media in helping our society put this principle into practice.

In terms of inclusiveness we all know that this country has potential to alleviate the suffering of many of our brothers and sisters. However, the gulf between the 'haves and the have- nots' continue to grow even in good times when our economic might be performing better.

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I think the media can help remind us that we all deserve an equitable share in the economic cake regardless of who we are and where we are located.

Therefore as we endeavor towards a free and open society, it is imperative to restate that without an articulate and responsible media, Zambia and the International community risk losing the opportunity to make this a better world for all.

My message to the media on this day is that they must not tire in empowering citizens with information, to enable them take up their proper role in contributing towards national efforts as building a peaceful, just and inclusive society.

For peace, stability and development to exist in the world and Zambia in particular, we must strive to inform and disseminate critical information to contribute toward providing checks and balances by reporting the truth at all times.

Providing reliable and accurate information can also aid in resolving whatever social conflicts we may experience especially when such information can aid dialogue in critical times.

Finally, I wish to congratulate all who participate in organising this event as well as Panos Southern Africa for hosting the Committee Secretariat.

Thank you and God bless us all!